# Total Control

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# Total Control

by EarthsickWithoutYou

Summary

Hannibal decides not to waste time, and finds Will right after their first meeting in Jack's office, offering to be his sugar daddy. Will is completely taken off-guard and while he *tries* to remain defensive and suspicious, he is soon swept away by Hannibal's adoring, spoiling, sexy attention...

Notes

I'm (once again ✨) 100% here to get away from my real-life stress by going all-in on the fluff and smut. So I confess to you right now, there will be long internal monologues for both Will and Hannibal, descriptions are often very detailed and the story is *Sweet and Sentimental* 💕💝

See the end of the work for more notes

# total control

*“I can't get close enough to you*
*I might crush your bones*
*With the power I feel running through*
*Your soul has a light I wanna see*
*Your love has total control over me”* -Morgan Wade

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Will barely registered the presence of another consultant in Jack’s office, even after he shook hands with the man.

He was still trying to shake off last night’s bad dream, still trying to believe the dream *was* broken and he had actually awakened several hours ago, let the dogs out, fed them, got in his car and drove to work. Despite the usual, welcome presence of the dogs to remind Will that reality was just that, and he belonged right there on solid ground, his progress in believing he was safe and the dream had lost its grip had been dubious at best.

Sluggish senses and hyper-alert neurons made for roughshod bedfellows at the best of times, but Will was relatively adept at dialing down his five senses so that he could breathe. The inundation of scents, sights and sounds alone, before one even got to the more visceral problems of touch and taste, would pummel him to oblivion if his brain got ahold of them.

Processing the world had to be divided into separate tasks, and within that, Will gave certain matters precedence. The work, for example. He had to be 100% “on” in order to close cases at the rate he did, but this endeavor wrung his tolerance for stimulation bone dry.

So he only bothered to take in the barest outline of a tall, broad-shouldered man with unusually high and sculpted cheekbones and lips almost as curious as his eyes. A tan suit, a tinge more casual than what this man usually wore, even though he was more dressed up than Will was that day, and Will was on his way to teach a class. That was nothing, a skimming of the surface, merely an echo of an impression.

The deep, rumbling tones of a voice with an accent Will couldn’t summon the energy to analyze and place. A waft of expensive cologne and money was just about the least subtle aspect of a man who prided himself on being subtle. But Will couldn’t spare the acuity to care why that would be.

This blessed respite of a mental fog, the perfect time to sit and enjoy a cup of perfectly terrible black coffee from the machine down the hall, was ruined by the stranger himself. It seemed that the stranger was not content to be such, would not settle for being just another talking head called upon by Jack to throw in his two cents about the ever-confounding Shrike case.

And the stranger should have been looking at the row of photos on the board, all those sad girls with cold midwest eyes and hair the color of smoldering embers. It was a chilling sight,

shimmering with priceless lost possibilities. Failing that, he should be engaging directly with Jack. If he wasn't here for that, then why have him here at all?

Jack always had a reason.

Will managed to skate by on one word answers until the stranger – belatedly, he recalled Jack calling him "Dr. Lecter" managed to yank him out of his happily self-imposed, numb daze.

If there had been another move to make on the Shrike, Will would be making it right now, but they had been stuck in limbo for days after the leads seemingly dried up. This had to be the most pointless meeting in the world.

Dr. Lecter's face gradually came into clearer focus as his dogged attempts to keep Will engaged in a direct conversation won out over Will's failure to resist the attention. He would rather die than admit that he craved attention that did not seem cultivated or directed at getting something from him, but that was the vibe he got off of Lecter now. Weird, yet true.

Distant *blah-blah-blahs* suddenly turned into Will being analyzed shrewdly right to his face, apropos of *nothing,* and his eyes blazed with indignation. To his fury, Dr. Lecter did not seem worried by his temper rising. Yeah, well, he fucking *should* be worried, how *dare* he analyze Will, and then be calm when Will got mad? Who did he think he was? But on the other hand, it soon became damningly obvious that Will should be even madder at Jack.

"Wait a minute," Will blurted when the puzzle pieces finally fell into place. "Whose profile are you working on?"

Dr. Lecter froze in the middle of his next brilliant, unsolicited piece of accurate, but annoying advice. Will glared at Jack, who looked like he had a few regrets.

"Whose profile is he working on?"

Since he already knew the extremely offensive answer, Will lurched up from his seat and slung his battered leather bag over the shoulder of his ugly grey-green-smudge colored shirt and stormed out after making what he consoled himself was an excellent *Incredible Hulk* allusion.

His pop cultural knowledge was one of the few aspects of Will that made him seem human, even if the sensation of normalcy never sank down to his bones. It helped to sell the idea of him as an actual person one could get to know, which was a lovely thought that he occasionally yearned to indulge.

All he really knew was that if he could convince others that he was more than a well-honed and rare tool for murder solving, or a creepy and worrisome shadow on the horizon, the bullshit and hurtful comments he had to deal with would be kept at their current irritating but manageable numbers.

Not to mention how used he felt by most of the people who had been in his life for any sustained period. Jack Crawford was well on his way to joining Alana Bloom in the *"this is*

*not a friendship, this is just insulting"* category, and even as a colleague, Jack was pushing it lately.

Overworking Will, but stating Will's limits openly, just to push Will past them (then blame Will), and now. Now! *Now?*

Hiring a therapist – a total *stranger,* no less – to profile Will in his very presence, without having the bare minimum, *bargain basement clearance* level decency to tell him of this plan?

The thing about feeling used was that eventually, he'd be all used up. When that delightful day arrived and he no longer coped enough with – well, anything – and was too burned out to be useful, he knew he would be promptly discarded.

He could imagine the disdain from his small circle of colleagues and then the upsetting pity from the few nice people he knew, like Beverly Katz and even her forensics colleagues, Brian Zeller and Jimmy Price. They would all watch him fade like a stain on the world that the sun eventually dried off its surface. And he'd be on the outside with them, watching, paralyzed, like in that one nightmare he often experienced in a few iterations.

It was too scary inside himself, but outside wasn't much better. God, he wanted nothing more than a double whiskey and to sit out on his porch with the dogs around him, letting liquor and good company empty his brain of such heavy matter.

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"Maybe go a little easier next time, Dr. Lecter, hmm?" Jack Crawford looked up at Hannibal with waning patience. "Best not to poke him like that. A more subtle approach, perhaps."

How amusing that Jack should think this meeting had been a failure or at least a let-down, when Hannibal knew it was a rousing success. But as always, the devil was in the details.

The purpose of the meeting for Jack was for Hannibal to get a read on Will by seeing him in the thick of his work mindset. And to perhaps tentatively extend a hand to help the troubled young man out of the quicksand in which – to Will's misfortune - his intense empathy and intellect thrived.

But as soon as he saw Will, Hannibal knew that wouldn't do at all, and he had much better plans for such a beguiling beauty.

As he thought of Will's gorgeousness, while Jack said a few more reasonable things about better ways to pitch Hannibal as a therapist, Hannibal reflected that it wasn't only Will's extraordinary, physical beauty that had him transfixed. It was how he also got an uncanny sense that Will Graham was the one person – perhaps in all the world – who possessed the capacity to fully understand him.

This should be a disturbing thought, and enough to make Hannibal turn from any further interaction, even with such an outstandingly pretty boy. However, there was another layer as well. Hannibal had looked into those gray-blue eyes, so like the ocean on rainy days, and felt the spark of a possibility in the air between them. Maybe Will could do more than See him.

Will understood darkness and hunger, not only because his work mired him there…but also because Will secretly harbored a deeply felt and highly skilled capacity towards violence.

Hannibal began to theorize, even knowing he was "jumping the gun," that Will Graham might someday understand and accept him. To be wanted and adored by someone for who he was, was a privilege and honor Hannibal had never aspired to, not having believed it possible.

So now, as he had all of these intermingled perfections, all of this blindingly shiny potential in his thoughts, there was certainly no room for anything as comparatively boring as work or officially being Will's therapist.

What's more, neither of those were what Will wanted or needed. He'd been worked into the ground already and looked – to Hannibal's distress – like he surfaced from the grave of the previous day's stress, only to step into a deeper, more depressing hole and get buried again.

Even a man as unusual as Hannibal, who also embraced and enjoyed being strange, an outlier from traditional mores, above and isolated from most of humanity, knew that he was being rather ambitious. That he should feel so strongly about Will, and be ready to risk it all falling apart in one terribly disappointing way or another, was too far, too much, too soon. But that told him all he needed to know on the matter in order to decide how to proceed.

Hannibal knew that he'd never feel such a powerful, passionate pull towards someone unless that person was worth the effort. Worth having to feel that deeply and step out over the thin ice of communication, hoping for true connection. Will was more than worth it.

He was a very good boy, had been sorely neglected, brow-beaten, taken advantage of, unappreciated and driven to a level of anxiety, a kind of sadness that set Hannibal on fire to make it all better. He was glad indeed to discover, from the evidence he'd casually gleaned so far, that Will was isolated and that no one had given him love and care-taking in a very long time.

Will must be exceedingly vulnerable and needy, which aroused Hannibal at the same time he felt comforted by knowing there were no other loved ones or important authority figures in Will's life to defeat or dispose of. He could be number one in Will's heart, and best of all, this was the rare time when his own motives were almost pure; he really did crave Will in every way, he longed to take care of that angel with the dented halo.

He had to have Will, and he *would.*

"Are you listening to me, Dr. Lecter?" Jack asked, brows raised in accusation. "I don't appreciate having my time wasted."

"Then it's a good thing that we are of one mind in that respect, Agent Crawford." Hannibal leveled Jack with his most delightful, trustworthy smile. "I don't intend to waste another second, as a matter of fact. I thank you for introducing me to Will, although I don't think you will be pleased with the answer I must give you."

“What? Are you saying that you aren’t going to go ahead with the profile, help me get Will properly assessed? This is literally a matter of life-and-death, Doctor.”

“Oh, yes, it certainly is. For you.” Hannibal nodded cheerfully at the bulletin board with its collection of midwestern college freshmen girls, all dead, all there as a reminder that some other innocent young woman with auburn hair and wind-chafed cheeks might be next. “And for them. But it really isn’t at all, for me. I also think it’s about time Will had someone in his life who isn’t in it merely to nudge him ever deeper into this work. As such, I find that I have quite the conflict of interest. It would be unethical for me to treat Will.”

“You also just don’t want to,” Jack deduced with a smile of growing disapproval.

“How quick and observant you are. That’s exactly right, I don’t want to be a therapist to Will, and I also don’t think it would be good for anyone. There is so much more I can do to help Will, but I’m afraid that will be in a personal capacity.”

Jack looked at him aghast, as if he was about to pinch himself and make sure this conversation was real.

“Alana said you were quite eccentric, but this is another level, Dr. Lecter.” Jack glared at him. “Are you actually…are you…do you mean to stand here in my office, today, while we’re killing ourselves over this Shrike case and considering how Will’s mind is struggling, and! Are you telling me you plan to ask Will out on a date?”

“Not exactly a date as such,” Hannibal acknowledged. “But you are getting warmer. Even so, it is none of your business, and I have someplace to be, rather urgently. Thank you again, Jack, and if you should ever need my services in a future case, please do not hesitate to ask.”

He turned and walked out of the room as Jack called angrily after him. “My one consolation is that there is no way Will Graham will ever agree to date you.”

Hannibal felt laughter bubbling in his throat and marveled at Jack underestimating him so entirely. But this was no time to lose his infamous composure. Setting aside Jack’s amusing opinion, he remained quiet in the hallway, with his usual perfect attitude of professional detachment. Inside, he felt anything but.

There was suddenly no time to lose, when he was so accustomed to feeling he had all the time in the world, until death chose to call on him. As there was no way to know when his demise might happen, he preferred to live at a savoring pace, getting the most of every moment.

He was presently unable to stop and enjoy anything. Now, where to find Will Graham and resume their conversation?

Hannibal smiled broadly as he heard the distinctly familiar sound of a fragile, haunted boy waging a war all alone. This time, a small-scale one, apparently against a coffee machine. He could hear Will hitting the machine and demanding that it provide his next dose of unacceptably bad coffee, and steered himself in that exact direction.

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Will was battling with the coffee machine, endeavoring to force it to give him another terrible coffee to get him through his impending 10am lecture, swearing at the useless contraption and considering that it must be nice to be stupid, what a pleasant life one might be able to live just by such amazing luck, when Dr. Lecter came sweeping into the tiny, stale- cardboard-gray colored staff "lounge."

The younger man blinked over at him, still smacking the side of the coffee machine hard enough to make his palm sting, and wondered why this guy looked so much like he was swanning in from a designer fashion shoot, like the colors of his whole demeanor and attire, and not only that, but how his clothes fit him and how he carried himself, all of that stuff – was just brighter and more vivid than anything else Will had seen in this goddamn building since ever.

The man must be aware of the fascinating aura that wafted from his strong but sleek physique, the languid curiosity that Will could just tell was a cover-up for a sharper, more unpredictable set of motives. This Lecter must know damned well that it would be hard for anyone not to find him interesting, and that he didn't fit in here. But he stuck around anyway, after a botched meeting that didn't land him a client, or a spot in Jack Crawford's good books, so far as Will could tell.

Maybe he was just like Will and barely belonged anywhere aside from certain highly specialized settings, except that Will didn't fit in because he was fucked in the head, and Hannibal Lecter didn't fit in because no one was supposed to look that good, that debonair, confident and intriguing, at what? 8-forty-something on a work morning.

Will couldn't even remember what day it was, or why such a thing would matter. Did it matter? Was that one of the first threads to the tapestry of reality that left when you finally lost the last of your marbles?

"You'll hurt yourself," Lecter observed, his shoulder hugging the side of the door frame in a way that showed off how broad his upper body was, how much space he took up in the narrow entrance to the glorified cubby of a "room." He nodded at Will's hand still hitting the coffee machine violently. "And we both know that coffee isn't worth it. May I purchase you one from the cafeteria downstairs?"

"You again," Will groaned, as if he hadn't just been analyzing him at an alarming speed that sadly announced that he was also human enough to be an idiot full of interest the second he met this strange therapeutic consultant.

"Me again," said the doctor simply, strolling forward with that same effortless attitude, as if life rolled off of him like water, instead of sinking into his pores like teeming snakes brimming with venom.

"Why would you want to buy me a coffee?"

Lecter tilted his head to one side slightly. Will had skipped over "Why did you follow me?" because secretly, it was nice to be followed and have someone so unusually fascinating

showing interest in him. Although he found Lecter bizarrely difficult to read, that was perversely an incredible relief for him. And while he had found the man's impromptu analysis to be obnoxious a few minutes earlier, at no point had he felt Lecter's own opinions, desires or worries permeating his own and making them indistinguishable.

Since Lecter was apparently too smart not to notice how Will skipped a question, Will rolled his eyes. "Well?"

"Because I like you."

Will almost dropped his empty styrofoam coffee cup on the floor; trembling, he set it on the counter. This was too weird, was he really supposed to believe this shit?

He brought himself, with considerable effort, to meet the older man's gaze. Eyes almost the same color as Will's favorite whiskey, naturally the one he could seldom afford, and there were small crow's feet just beside them that crinkled when this strange man smiled. He was smiling *now*, and Will still couldn't get a read on him, even after extending his "Spidey senses" as much as he could, given his headache and exhaustion. Of course, he could feel the *basic* aspects of the man; he could skim the surface by understanding his personality, his general preferences, dislikes, a few quirks he'd picked up from body language and the tone of Lecter's voice. He knew how Hannibal felt, but he could only sense the emotional part. He had no idea what the guy's motives were or the deeper context of his thinking.

Again, it was impossible to remain immune to the appeal of such an extraordinary circumstance, but he tried to remain grumpy and disinterested.

*"What."*

"You heard me," Lecter reminded him cheerfully.

Will bristled, feeling his cheeks turn pinker, irritated by the embarrassment of how easily he responded to these attentions. "I'm not deaf, but I am also not a likable man, so this begs the question, what do you really want with me?"

He felt slightly intimidated when Lecter took a step further, but remained politely outside of Will's personal space. And since the sensation was not at all unpleasant, in fact veering closer to the opposite, Will was momentarily dizzy.

Lecter was only a couple of inches taller than Will, but his smooth, carefree demeanor dwarfed Will's comparative insecurity, making him feel small and boyish. He was immediately angry that this didn't feel bad or insulting, either, but rather like a compliment, one he didn't mind accepting, even.

That sounded even more insane than Will had felt before setting eyes on the man. And that was definitely, *really* saying something.

"I find you beautiful, charming without realizing it, fascinatingly intelligent and dazzlingly sweet. You're enticing and alluring. I want to buy you a coffee, and breakfast or lunch, depending which you may need, and spend time with you. Get to know you better."

“It’s nowhere near lunchtime.”

“I’m sure I could convince the staff to fix you something lunch-appropriate if you prefer.”

“Buy me coffee and food…as friends?” Will clung to the counter, digging his palm into the corner. It happened to be the same hand he’d used to whack the side of the coffee machine moments before, and now it hurt like hell.

He swallowed down the pain out of habit, but Lecter’s brow creased. The doctor looked down at him with disapproval.

“Stop hurting yourself, please. I won’t hurt you and I don’t want to bother you or take advantage of you. I simply like you a great deal, and I have a proposition for you. Please, do me the good grace of not jumping to unsavory conclusions, as I do realize how that sounds. I want to offer you something more substantial than a fly-by-night seduction.”

The *“stop hurting yourself”* had been bothersome enough, fluttering in Will’s stomach like a small gaggle of butterflies, each with a broken wing. *This* was plain crazy.

“I don’t do relationships.”

“I assumed as much. That’s why I am not offering you that, either. It’ s something…else. May I tell you about it? I will respect you, your space and your preferences with the utmost devotion. And honestly, Will. It must sound better than standing in this depressing excuse for a coffee lounge, bruising your palms trying to get a caffeine fix when you really just need to relax.”

“You have no idea what I need.”

Lecter smiled, and the look was downright wicked, but once again in the most charming way that unnerved Will and made the earth tilt off its axis.

“Would you like to test that theory?”

Will glowered at him and walked past with the best imitation of human dignity he could manage. Over his shoulder, he shot back a dry “I do need coffee. You hit the bullseye on that one, at least. Let’s go.”

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“The cafeteria is only a few notches up in quality from that dreadful lounge,” Hannibal observed.

He held the door for Will, who gave him an uncertain look, something delicate behind those ocean eyes, bobbing on dark waves, glistening like treasure he could not currently seize upon.

The vulnerable expression fled Will’s face as soon as it unintentionally displayed itself, and Will snorted a derisive laugh. “What did you expect?”

Hannibal looked around the beige and white colored environs, consisting of a long counter offering various forms of dubious nourishment, a few staff servers and one worker at the register, and a smattering of sad little round tables. Almost every fellow diner in the room was working while they ate, and overall, the ambience was of a large cubicle, disguised as a place of between-tasks relaxation and refueling.

Everything about its bland layout and coloring, the lack of any discernible decor scheme, and quiet, cheap-sounding "jazz piano" covers of popular songs from about fifteen years ago, seemed to be encouraging the FBI students and agents within to get back to work.

He pursed his lips and squared his shoulders, finding that having Will by his side, shuffling his feet nervously and looking like he wanted to run for his life, was well worth spending time in such a regrettably low-class establishment.

"To be honest, I was picturing something a *degree* or two nearer gentility," Hannibal shot Will a look of commiseration. "We are, after all, in a building where men and women risk their lives every day to save others, with what I understand to be an unimpressive salary and few other perks to speak of. I suppose I shouldn't be surprised at the commonality of poor-quality amenities offered to our most admirable and indispensable government workers, but it is one thing to know that such is most likely the case, and another to be looking at that appalling excuse for a floor tile color pattern. Really, is the expectation to make you poor souls become disoriented so that you lose your appetite and return to work post-haste?"

Will grinned, the look of it so sunny and sudden that Hannibal's heart beat faster as a wave of desire washed over him with surprising strength. Quickly, Will forced the look of great amusement and entertainment away and looked sour again, but it was too late.

"It's gonna take a little more than an admittedly hideous example of cafeteria design to disorient me," Will said wryly.

He pressed a finger to the center of his glasses' frame and pushed them up into their proper place.

"You have the most glorious smile I have ever seen," said Hannibal with perfect frankness.

Will blushed; his eyes went wide and he took a step back. "I'm not smiling."

"You did, before you made yourself stop. I notice things, Will. Or at least, when I think someone is worth paying special attention to, and deserves the utmost of care and affection, I am very quick on the uptake."

Will scratched at his neck, an anxious tic that only drew Hannibal's attention to what a gorgeous neck it *was*, just made for sinking his teeth into to mark and claim. But he must go slowly. It was not a race, and Will was not someone to merely seduce. Will was to be treasured and consumed in the deepest, most satisfying senses.

Yes, ambitious indeed. But worth being more whimsical than normally and taking a risk or two. After all, just *look* at him.

Will grumbled, “This was a bad idea.”

Hannibal shook his head. “You’re glad we came. See it through, darling. What negative outcome could possibly occur? At least compared to all the good that may come of it. I promise that if, when we’re done here, you wish to be released from my acquaintance entirely, I will let you go and not bother you, ever again.”

This was a bold-faced lie, but of course he must say it. Hannibal’s ego took a small hit from knowing that even if Will rejected him, he wouldn’t be able to give up and let go. However, he had the consolation of knowing that any such rejection would be a mistake on Will’s part, most likely having to do with the boy’s own self-hatred and need for more special guidance to arrive where he belonged.

Still, he was optimistic of closing the deal much sooner. The scent of Will’s skin, under a thankfully light layer of cheap aftershave, was the most seductive natural smell he had ever perceived on another in all his years, like sandalwood and roses, yet so much better than those basic descriptors could ever embody. Will also smelled of fear, strikingly obvious in its tell-tale citrus hues. Yet Hannibal gathered no impression of anger towards himself or the deadlier suspicions which Hannibal indeed warranted. Fear of love, and of true companionship, more likely.

He considered the enterprise off to a wonderful beginning, especially when Will spoke again.

Facing him head-on, Will narrowed his eyes accusingly. “*Darling?* Did you recently bump your head? We just met, less than an hour ago. I’m only here because I’m falling asleep and the machine’s broken upstairs, and I have nothing better to do than accept your brief and admittedly kind offer, so…”

“Oops,” Hannibal smiled. He wasn’t mocking Will, but he was teasing a bit. Very flirtatiously. Without getting any closer, he leaned down, which simulated increased proximity by the unspoken reference to their small but pleasant height difference. “You said something nice about me at the end there.”

Will got flustered again and nodded at the counter to their left. “Okay, this has been weird, even for me, which is sort of impressive, but oh, look, that’s the coffee line. Are you getting something, too?”

“I’ll reserve such an unlikely decision for a closer look,” Hannibal replied, unable to suppress his dislike of the place.

Will softened and warmed to him each time his obvious flirtations were temporarily replaced by honesty, with opinions many people might find snobbish. Hannibal didn’t mind being seen already, because it was Will. Otherwise, he might be uncomfortable at the boy’s amusement and appreciation of his less-agreeable traits. Will was simply different in every way, and it had Hannibal feeling breathless.

“Let’s go then,” Will chuckled.

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The cafeteria's morning offerings were simple and straightforward, and Will had never found them objectionable, but it was pretty funny to watch Lecter responding to every breakfast option as if he was choosing a method by which to be put to death.

There were a few different types of popular cereal in single-serving boxes, good old-fashioned little cartons of milk like you got in grade school, a choice of orange or apple juice, some muffins and bagels. The butter and cream cheese were kept beside the milk and juice in the fridge, so it seemed safe enough to partake of them.

The woman behind the register stifled a yawn as Will approached with his meager selection, about as much as he was willing to let his strange new… "friend" … or whatever, spend on him. It was only a box of Apple Jacks, some milk, and a regular-sized cup so he could use the coffee machine provided by Dunkin Donuts, which was the next step after this transaction.

Lecter had indeed opted out of all except a bottled water and a cup for his own coffee, since his inquiry about the existence of tea offerings had met with a distressing offer from another worker who had been restocking the cereal. "There's AriZona tea cans in the vending machine over there," the man had suggested, nodding across the room. "The Arnold Palmer flavor's not too bad."

"Thank you for the recommendation," said Hannibal with a mixture of pity and loathing.

Will had no idea why he kept finding this bizarre man so amusing and kind of (maybe) cute, but Hannibal had been right about him. He had nothing else going on aside from utterly miserable drudgery, and against his own better instincts and definitely contrary to any feelings he intended to let show, he was almost sort of enjoying himself.

Okay, how else was he supposed to feel, with this ridiculously handsome man, who drew everyone's desirous gazes every time he entered a room, looking at him as if he hung the moon? Paying attention to whatever Will said and did as if it mattered?

*I mean, he's obviously out of his mind, but there's something about him. He's not unpleasant. Fuck, he's really pleasant. What the…ugh. I could like him, not that I'll probably ever see him again after this. Still…why me? Of all people, why would he ever be drawn to me?*

Curiosity got the best of him, after an unexpected, small rush he felt when Hannibal paid for his food and drink.

"Why me?" he asked, leading the way to the coffee machine.

"Allow me, if you don't mind." Hannibal reached for his cup. Will shrugged, again baffled, and watched the older man fill both of their cups with hot coffee. "How do you take yours?"

"Cream and sugar…I usually just eye it, I don't know."

"I would say…" Hannibal assessed the coffee and its origin point (the Dunkin' machine) carefully and finished, "Two of each should do the trick."

He made both of their drinks the same way, sealed the lids on each cup, and carried the tray containing those and Will's cereal and milk as if he could imagine no finer privilege.

"I told you already," Hannibal smiled, pulling out Will's chair at a table, then setting the tray down on it. "Why you, that is."

"It just doesn't make any sense," Will admitted. "Forgive me for being so incredulous."

Before taking a seat himself, he prepared Will's cereal by opening the little box of Apple Jacks (Will was sure he'd never done *that* before) and pouring the contents into the provided, drab-gray bowl. It must have taken admirable restraint not to appear too horrified at the neon-orange shade of the cereal hoops, but Hannibal managed it. Courteously, he inquired as to Will's preferred milk-to-cereal ratio.

"I eye it," Will said again. "Not too much, not too little."

Hannibal nodded as if this was fascinating intel, and then poured the perfect amount of milk in. He opened up the plastic bag containing a disposable spoon and one of those stiff, kind of useless napkins that all cafeterias have, and tugged the napkin loose to its full (pathetic) capacity. Finally, he placed the spoon atop the napkin and shifted Will's coffee cup to the exactly right angle so that the drinking opening was facing Will.

"Ummm….thanks," Will acknowledged.

A few agents-in-training, one of whom had been in Will's lecture a year ago, stopped in their tracks and murmured something about "What a gentleman, oh my *gosh*…" and "Go, *Professor Graham!*" that made Will shrink down in his seat and try to disappear off the face of the earth.

"Will, please. I need you to sit up and show me proper posture. I will ask you for relatively few things on a regular basis, if you decide that my terms are amenable to you. However, you will find that within my few requirements, I am quite a stickler for the rules. In this case, you will strain your neck, shoulders and back, and I refuse to have that. It's obvious that your body is already under considerable strain."

"Jesus," Will muttered, blushing again. He hated the heat in his face and didn't know how to feel about the way his heartbeat had gotten so fast while the fluttery feeling came back to his stomach.

It wasn't hunger, and Will knew that he must be starving; he barely ate anything these days because he simply never remembered to until he was about to faint. Even so, his reactions to Dr. Lecter were starting to push his usual series of depressing symptoms out of the way.

"Sorry," Will said, meaning to be totally sarcastic and a bit offensive, meaning to *be* offended by this stranger thinking he could drop out of the sky into Will's life and start telling him how to live "properly."

For better or worse, however, his tone sounded almost…inexplicably…*sincere.*

“Forgiven,” Hannibal said with that annoyingly adorable, little secret smile just between them.

The look of it was beginning to smooth out Will’s jagged, messed-up state of mind with the most unexpected, combined taste of comfort and…maybe. *Excitement?*

Will gave serious consideration to digging into his cereal with the worst possible manners, chewing with his mouth open, and all that, but he couldn’t stand the thought of disappointing Dr. Lecter. Oh, God, he really was losing it. Was he *this* starved for kindness and attention? He couldn’t take the thought of being “bad” on purpose and of having to watch as Dr. Lecter’s face fell from that primly pleased smile to a frown of dismay.

*What the…*

“What precisely do you think I needed forgiveness for?” Will settled for asking in the flat, blunt manner he used, when he was suspicious and in a low-tolerance-for-b.s.-mood (yes, usually his default setting).

“Nothing serious,” Hannibal said as he twisted open the bottle of water, apparently more intent on fidgeting with it than drinking. Same went for his coffee, sitting there ignored while he gazed at Will. “You spend too much time either being held responsible for what you cannot possibly manage or be accountable for, or blaming yourself for anything in sight that does not work out. I’m not going to contribute to that line of treatment or thinking, Will. Ever.”

“You, uh. Not to be a broken record, but you don’t know me.”

“I’m getting to know you.” Hannibal had the audacity to nudge Will’s foot under the table with his own, and Will had the sudden, slack-jawed idiocy to let him. “That’s how this works.”

“We’re at my *work.* You only came across me because my boss tried to sneak you into a meeting and have you analyze me without my permission. Really bad foundation for so much as a colleague relationship, never mind anything more.”

“So, because we didn’t meet on a dating app, or by some serendipitous encounter in a grocery store or bar, I cannot begin courting you?”

*“Courting…?”*

Will had managed a bite or two of his cereal, which predictably he couldn’t taste. This time, it was Hannibal – uh, Dr. Lecter – and his unaccountable power to make him feel strange and floaty, rather than Will’s insanely high level of daily anxiety.

He let his spoon crash into the cereal bowl with a small plunk and splash of milk that thankfully, Hannibal allowed to pass without comment, apparently issuing instant forgiveness.

“Are you pranking me or something?” Will looked around as if there could be hidden cameras.

“It upsets me to know that being treated like a prince, which is the only way you *ought* to be treated, is so unheard of to you that you question either my sanity, the fabric of reality, or the likelihood of a practical joke.”

“You have no motive for a practical joke, and that kind of thing is completely below you.” Will allowed his fascination to surface again, helplessly. “You would find it intolerably rude to see someone else acting like that, and I can’t imagine you’d ever get your kicks that way.”

“You’re getting to know me, too,” Hannibal said, and to Will’s satisfaction, now he blushed. “It’s a nice feeling, being seen by you. Go on, finish your analysis, then. I do believe that confronting my interest in you as if it is a case you’ve been assigned to investigate may be the best way for you to come to a correct conclusion and end your current disbelief.”

“Probably.” Will blew on his coffee, too hot to take a sip yet, and sat up straighter again. Doing that did make him realize how much he’d been slouching lately, the toll that had taken on his spine. “Okay, then, since you’re not offended by that…”

“Oh, not at all,” said Hannibal blithely, “I find it quite flattering, and even a bit exciting to be the focus of your brilliant mind.”

“For crying out…” Will trailed off, pressing his shaking hands hard into his khaki-clad knees. “The evidence is already conclusive, it’s just that the *conclusion* seems to somewhat mess with the fabric of reality. I get that you’re saying you find me attractive and that my abilities impress you. Even though I was really mean to you back in that meeting, and you must have heard me described as somewhere between a freak show and a science fair project before we even met.”

“You were mean to me because the artificial and forced nature of Jack’s ruse bothered you,” Hannibal observed. “I don’t blame you. Truth be told, your attitude and sass were… *provocative.* In the best sense. I don’t tolerate rudeness from anyone under any circumstances, normally, yet I’m somewhat concerned that I would let you get away with murder and not be at all able to help myself.”

“But I’m just. I mean.” Will cupped his neck as more heat spread all the way from the tips of his ears down to his upper chest, making him sure he couldn’t drink hot coffee at the moment because his complexion would probably turn maroon. “I’m not fishing for compliments. You hate rudeness, and I could never stand acting so conceited. So why don’t you just come out with whatever your offer is?”

He checked his watch. “I have a class to teach in a half hour and it’s a ten minute walk across campus, so…I guess for now, I’ll accept that you’re most likely being sincere. This is your big moment, go ahead.”

“My only fear in making this offer is that you may feel as if I’m…condescending or putting a spotlight on aspects of your life that you may be sensitive about already. Have I earned one more pass for you to hear me out?”

“I’ve got nothing to lose, like you said,” Will admitted, “You piqued my curiosity, you got me Apple Jacks.”

He couldn’t help smiling, a brighter look than he could remember showing in ages. “I’ll hear you out.”

“Excellent. I knew you were a very good boy, Will.”

Will wasn’t even surprised anymore when Lecter said such absurd things, nor when his pulse raced in response, but this phrase in particular seemed to impact him much too intensely. He swallowed hard and held back the “thank you” that tried to burst from his lips.

Hannibal pushed aside the facade that had been his tray of water and coffee, and folded his hands neatly on the table. Will glanced down at Lecter’s beautiful, tanned hands, how strong they looked, and the veins lining his skin, as heat prickled at the back of his neck. He pumped the mental brakes on any other ideas that might want to come in…like thoughts of grabbing, choking, or even worse/better…well, he wasn’t going to let his mind go to spanking. Fucking hell, he’d had the thought and it wasn’t going anywhere, was it?

As elegant and unfazed as one could possibly be in such a circumstance, Hannibal accepted the gift of Will’s eye contact by meeting it steadily, with the utmost respect.

“I assume you are familiar with the concept of ‘sugar dating,’” Hannibal began.

“In theory,” Will said, and maybe he shouldn’t have been surprised, but somehow he felt blown away. And had no idea how else to feel except terrified, so overwhelmed that he might actually keel over and hurl and make an ass of himself.

“I’d like you to consider allowing me to become your provider,” Hannibal elaborated gently.

His voice was so tender and sincere-sounding, and Will wanted to scream. It was all some kind of – either it was an insult and Will was being propositioned like a sex worker at his *actual* workplace, before lunchtime, or it was incredibly flattering and carried an idea about being taken care of in the longer term. This, Will knew he could never deserve, much less tolerate, and his skin started to feel like it was crawling.

“I can’t,” he said in a state of despair which he couldn’t have explained even if he tried to do an investigation on himself. “I. There’s no way. I’m sorry, there’s been some kind of mistake, and I have to go now. Thank you for breakfast.”

“Will.” Hannibal waited until Will scrambled up like the coward he was and almost entangled himself in the straps of his leather bag while throwing it over his shoulder.

“*Darling.*”

The word made a panicking Will feel as if he’d been offered a nice bubble bath, not too hot, *just right*, and a massage, and for Hannibal to keep looking at him on purpose and wanting to take care of him. What an awful, unacceptable word. He hated himself for wanting it, to hear it over and over.

In vain, Will tried to get his bag straightened out and add a nicer thank you but no thank you before making his escape. Hannibal tugged on his sleeve fondly to stop him.

“Slow down, please. I’m going to let you go now.” Hannibal stood up and slipped a hand right under the straps of Will’s bag, easily smoothing out the tangles and then adjusting it. Everywhere his touch briefly grazed Will’s chest and side felt so good.

“There, now. Please, just take my card and think about it. That is more than enough to allow me to leave here feeling very happy indeed.”

“You actually mean that,” Will stated, because he couldn’t get as clear an understanding of what made this man tick as he could with anyone else, but he could tell some things that felt *important*. This wasn't fake on Hannibal's end, whatever else it might be.

“Of course I do.”

Lecter took Will’s hand and Will let him, but couldn’t make any more eye contact. He stared down at his shoes, the scream-and-run feeling making him go wild with panic inside.

“My dear boy,” Hannibal said with a smile in his silken tone. He brushed his lips gently, softly over Will’s knuckles and gave the trembling, cold-sweaty hand a tender squeeze before dropping it. “Please, take it as a rare compliment directly from my heart and as a flattering incident. It can be that and nothing more, unless you decide otherwise. My card has my number, work and home…my email. Even my addresses for office and home. You are welcome to contact me at your leisure using any method that feels comfortable.”

Will kept staring down, not seeing his shoes or the floor, or anything at all except for the man he wasn’t looking at. Hannibal was already seared into his mind as if he’d scarred Will for life. He couldn’t say a word, couldn’t make his voice work, afraid he’d cry or worse, actually scream and run, and he couldn’t do that here.

“I dearly hope to hear from you soon,” Hannibal concluded, and he must have gone then.

Will counted off a minute just to be sure it was safe to look up, and when Hannibal actually was nowhere to be seen, his heart sank heavily in his chest. The business card clamped in his slippery hand was on strong, expensive, cream-colored paper, and a small waft of Lecter’s luxurious cologne lingered in the air. He knew it really had all happened, no matter how unbelievable it was.

There was no way he could call this man or ever, *ever* see him again, and there was no way he was letting go of the damn card upon pain of death.

Will’s throat ached with the effort of holding back sobs. His fingers closed harder around the card, letting its edge sink into his skin and leave a mark. He’d get rid of it, anyway, or else he would be tempted to actually use it. But for now…Will would just hold onto it until he calmed down and his mind cleared and he could breathe again. He didn’t know why, but just holding it, knowing that it embodied Hannibal Lecter’s desire for him and that offer, made him feel as if he was safe and protected. The thing was, no feeling could have freaked him out worse than this exact one.

Still, he found himself holding onto the card later on, when he was almost back to functioning at his version of “normal,” and he even brought it home with him. Maybe he’d just put it on the table beside his bed to help him sleep that night and get rid of it in the morning…

# obsessed

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"*Baby, we can both sleep when we're dead*
*I don't know where to begin*
*Can I hold you till the walls cave in?*
*Baby, I am so obsessed*" -Morgan Wade

***

Will sat in his car, parked in the driveway designated for patients of Dr. Hannibal Lecter. The office building itself was about what he'd expected, stately, impressive. But from what he had experienced two days ago, Will wasn't sure that anything about Hannibal would be predictable once he got inside. And he was going in.

*I'm* gonna *go in. Just another minute.*

It was clearly best to take another minute and do a *third* visual analysis of his surroundings, make sure there weren't any red flags or offensive suggestions on the property – no political affiliation paraphernalia, no patients tearfully hurtling out the door and towards the street as if they'd just been accosted, no…

Will almost laughed at his own desperate attempt to conceive potential "red flags" from the exterior of the man's workplace. He couldn't decide if he wanted to be scared off or reassured.

But clearly, Hannibal would find signs or flags of any kind on his property to be tacky, and probably would turn tail before entering any premises with such tasteless decor.

He was much too smooth, confident and skilled socially for Will to believe the man would repel or upset any patient, leading him to an unfortunate certainty that most patients probably left here feeling much better than when they came. How many of them were not just mentally healed, but heart-warmed, or worse, developed an unhealthy, yet thoroughly understandable attachment tantamount to "romantic feelings" for their therapist?

Will still recalled the power of that rumbling, deep voice to slip under the skin like a needle filled with drugs that would make anyone feel loose, relaxed, open…full of longing, uncomfortably excited…worst of all, addicted. One hit could be enough.

He should go cold turkey now, save them both a lot of trouble and even potential heartache. Maybe the worst part was feeling that genuine comfort, as if someone would be there for him whenever he was sad, scared, or just needed intimacy…support…*love*. There, because they *wanted* to be, and wanted nothing from him but just to be together.

Considering the consequences of an hour in this guy's hypnotic presence was bad enough, when Will applied the theories to his own experience. There obviously had to be a catch. What Hannibal had represented and proposed to him must be a seductive but ultimately shallow ploy. The whole *sugar daddy* thing, the idea of a delusional and potentially dangerous individual, or just a cruel trick. But all the same, Hannibal's voice and how it seemed to stroke over Will's touch-starved, freezing-sweaty skin like fingers…it had followed him into his dreams all night.

Just the merest little effort on his part made those feelings come slamming back into his system, momentarily blocking out the cornucopia of negative feelings which – naturally – were his usual daily, emotional terrain. Those were probably smarter ways to feel.

Hannibal Lecter, in one way or another, ranging from the innocent but foolish, to the criminal and destructive and all that lay between, must be a mirage.

He knew, just fucking *knew* this man's patients had raging crushes on him all the time. Why should he care, or worse, feel jealousy, when he was already trying to talk himself out of even being here?

Hannibal chose you. He could have approached almost anyone and they'd fall at his feet, but he didn't tell one of his patients they couldn't continue because he had personal feelings for them and then refer them elsewhere, wait a while and ask them out, no, he probably couldn't really care less about them beyond wanting to help in a professional capacity. He goes home and forgets all about them.

*He likes* you.

*Jesus fucking christ.*

There weren't any other cars in the driveway or parked in front of the place, and as for the garage at the top of the drive, Will was sure it housed Hannibal's own car. The damp, misty day in mid-September ensured a liberal smattering of wet leaves, carpeting the otherwise immaculate, emerald green grass on the front lawn, clinging to the otherwise flawless gray roofing on both the building and the garage. A compelling air of mystery seemed to surround the place and invite Will in like a softly sung spell from a witch.

*Are you going in or not, oh my God,* do *something, one way or another!*

He could go in. He wouldn't be interrupting an appointment, probably, if he quit stalling to nervously over analyze the situation and got his ass in there, soon. Now. Someone else could show up any minute and I'll lose the chance to get him alone. "Get him?" *What?* Jeez.

His head throbbed incessantly. It must be the work of accumulating more and more creative ways to fear Hannibal and suspect that the whole scenario was one from which he should escape while he still could.

He dry-swallowed two aspirin, then grabbed a kleenex from the glove box and actually mopped his brow. While he had no idea why he'd been so overheated, sweaty, and even *more*

prone to being oversensitive and easily disturbed than usual lately, at least he could do his best to be semi-presentable.

There wasn't much to be said for his typical rumpled-professor outfit, but he didn't look terrible, either. It would have to do.

Will shut his car engine off, shoved the keys in the pocket of his brown winter coat, then made it up to the front door of the tall, imposing, tan-brick building. Trying the knob, he found the door open for patients to enter, as he had suspected. The mist in the air was cool, and stepping through it gave brief, very welcome relief to Will's feverishly hot forehead.

That made it easier to keep going.

He found himself in a small but comfortable waiting room that was nicer than anyone's whole office at Quantico. There were some interesting artworks neatly hung on the wall, in a straight line that swayed slightly and made him realize he was bleary-eyed, glasses fogged up, too. He couldn't bring himself to focus on the paintings, although perhaps he could have interpreted something useful about how Hannibal's decor preferences communicated to his patients.

But he was frantic with anxiety, despite forcing himself to stay quiet, so that the most noise anyone could have heard in the waiting room wasWill's heavy breathing. Whipping his glasses off, he gave them a quick cleaning with the sleeve of his plaid shirt, then squared his shoulders and tried smiling, as if he knew why he was there and had some concept of what might occur. The smile just made him feel weird, so he let it go and – he *actually knocked*.

He knocked on the door to Hannibal's actual office, the inner sanctum beyond the mellow and perfectly composed purgatory of the waiting room. The biblical metaphor suggested, to Will's instantly deep worry, that Hannibal's office would be heaven and the outside world was hell. But he knew logically, there was no way anyone could have this much of an impact on his emotional world from such a fleeting encounter.

It had just been too long since he'd been hit on, and he'd let himself believe he'd be alone forever, and Hannibal had some kind of inherent ability to transfix whom he pleased, and that was all.

The door opened moments later, revealing Hannibal, dressed in an impeccable and striking three-piece suit, looking devastatingly handsome and much too happy to see him. It wasn't that Hannibal acted over-the-top or smothered him with instant excitement, but it was the small indicators, like the way his eyes sparkled at the sight of Will.

"Um…*hi*." He got that much out, then ran out of ideas on how to continue.

"Will," Hannibal smiled invitingly, holding the door open as he stepped back. "What a wonderful and unexpected treat. I'm so glad you stopped by."

It was surreal to see him again in person after allowing the previous encounter to grow so far out of proportion with its actual significance, the more he'd thought about it. Hannibal was not the product of a fantasy, built merely on the foundation that a handsome man had said

such things to him and kissed his hand; he really *was* as attractive and instantly enthralling as Will remembered.

He guessed this was certainly *one* way to find out he was, or could be, attracted to men. A man, at least. Hannibal Lecter must be the ultimate litmus test for sexual orientation. If anyone was even slightly inclined to maybe find a man attractive, one exposure to Hannibal would confirm just how far over the line of "bi-curious" they truly were.

The suit was tailored to fit Hannibal exactly, a dark blue deeper than navy and closer to night, with an ivory shirt that had thin, matching-blue stripes and a tie which – whimsically – disrupted the harmony of the outfit by virtue of its burgundy and copper color scheme, but even more so from its paisley, swirling pattern. The combination of colors, patterns and fabrics shouldn't work but it did, a little too well. Hannibal had this sort of thing down to an art.

Will's "fashion" standards were more based on "whatever shirt is clean" and "are those the pants I got dry-erase marker on or the other ones?"

His quick-darting eyes carefully, if messily, cataloged the man's broad, powerful upper body and how it sloped down into such a trim waist, and then the big, tanned, vein-lined hands he had been thinking about, against his own better judgment, and long legs outfitted in yet more smooth, plain-but-bold night-blue, and shining designer shoes in a burgundy shade that *almost* made the tie permissible. But Hannibal didn't need anything to be permissible in order to excel at it and make it work.

The rules that pretty much everyone followed were straightforward when it came to hitting on someone. It was an etiquette so well known that even Will knew it, and he had barely ever had a chance to use it. *Had* he ever actually hit on someone? Nah. Mild flirtation was the furthest limb he'd been willing to venture out to in the past.

First of all, "when the person you want to hit on is in a bad mood" was normally a no-go. One would back off, try some other time, maybe.

Second, "right after a work meeting" was not the time to do it, and probably meant that you were tempted to flirt with someone you shouldn't. And of course, you didn't go looking for a stranger and then start bubbling over with impossible, charming compliments. Or take the stranger to breakfast while *still in their workplace.* Most of all, just asking to be someone's *sugar daddy*, there and then, the day you met them, was a faux pas and downright stupid, too, unless you were Hannibal. And then it changed someone's whole world. *Will's* world. Maybe it was changing, maybe it could be something closer to happiness. Even a small bit closer would mean so much.

Everything swayed again; the room went wobbly. Will laid a clammy hand tentatively on the doorframe, feeling as if even this, touching any part of Hannibal's office, was too much of an imposition.

"Do you want to come inside, Will?" Hannibal did that affectionate little head tilt thing and leaned down, getting a bit closer.

He looked into Will's borderline-distraught face and crooked-forced smile. And his forehead creased. "Please, my dear, come in and relax for a while."

So soft, but so sturdy. The voice, the demeanor and the man.  This, at last, was a safe place...or so Will let himself believe.

"Am I…interrupting your work?" His voice thankfully came out clear, despite its worn and wavering tone.

"Not at all. Please."

The repeated entreaty did the final work of nudging Will into the room, even if every step was still heavy with hesitation.

Will stood in the middle of the huge office – staring wonderingly at the upper floor library which could be accessed by ladder. Yet more bookshelves hugged two walls on the first level. Rich colors, dark but warm, dominated the space. Plenty of deep red, an earthy green, cherrywood-brown.

The lighting had somehow been modulated to exactly as low as it could be without being dim. It was…rather romantic lighting for an office. But since Hannibal had apparently been alone, Will assumed he had made the place cozier once his previous patients departed.

The desk was covered in papers, and was not exactly messy, but showed more inclination to human frailty than anything else Will had seen of Hannibal yet. He felt drawn to it, but walking over getting a better look would be ridiculously rude at this early point in the visit.

"Will?"

"Hmm?"

There stood Hannibal before him, hands tucked in his pockets. He was larger than life. "I said, you arrived at an ideal time. I'm finished with patients for the evening. My last appointment was an hour ago, and luckily for me, I stayed a while longer to work on some sketches. I am tremendously relieved that I didn't go home earlier and miss you."

Tremendously relieved?

Will couldn't help a low, sardonic chuckle at his own expense.

Hannibal looked curious. "Something I said?"

He managed to gently sweep a curl off of Will's pale brow without his touch actually grazing the skin. Goosebumps broke out all over Will anyway. Maybe the skillful avoidance of direct touch made the thought of actually being touched even better. And Will had nice ideas, silly ideas, of how that touch would feel.

"No, it's just. Not you, it's me," Will gestured at himself. "I couldn't help thinking, 'Tremendously relieved' is how most people probably feel when they avoid seeing me."

“Most people are boring, foolish and beneath my interest. However, even with this conviction previously embedded in my tastes, I can’t fathom anyone reacting to you in that way.”

“I didn’t just make it up,” Will clarified, lest it sound like he was putting himself down in an over-the-top way simply to get (even more) attention from Hannibal. “I overhear people and I get these…waves of their emotions that crash over me even just by walking by them in the halls. I wish I could shut those perceptions down and stay in the dark about their opinions of me.”

“It’s not that I thought that you were telling fibs, darling.” Hannibal smiled. “But I mean that I can’t conceive of avoiding you or doing otherwise than to put myself in your direct line of notice as often as possible. You’ve no idea how difficult I found it not to contact you again. I promised to give you time and space, but I did so without anticipating the effect it would have on me.”

There was too much going on in the entire speech, from the parental word choice of “fib,” to the *goddamn-fucking* “darling,” finished with the cherry-on-top of “the effect it had.”

Since he couldn’t actually deal with any of that, at all, Will just changed the subject.

“I know it’s weird to just show up here out of the blue, instead of calling, texting or at least emailing first.”

Hannibal soaked up the sight of Will, observing, no doubt, the sheen of perspiration that clung to his skin and wetted his curls. He had probably been able to feel the burning temperature of Will’s skin just from touching his hair. This thought made Will’s cheeks turn pink, which was an added heat he did *not* need, from wondering if he smelled like sweat. He must, mustn’t he? Couldn’t be good. But you’d never know from the way Hannibal lingered so close to him, like he couldn’t get enough of everything about Will.

The older man watched Will shiver for a few moments. His hands, back down by his sides, formed fists and then released again, as if to restrain another urge of touching.

And then he said “I don’t care if it’s weird. If anything, that intrigues me. I look forward to hearing what inspired you to drive here, after another long, hard day at the FBI. And I did give you my card with all those methods of finding me. You could have visited my home, that address was included. I would have been equally happy to greet you there. It is delightful to have our second meeting face to face without any devices or miles between us. May I offer you a glass of wine?”

Will’s eyes widened. “You keep *wine* at your psychiatry office? Do you usually offer it to patients, or just friends?”

A playful smirk provided some indication of the answer to follow, and only made the words more charming. “I keep a few bottles here, in case a friend comes by, or merely for myself to relax. I often spend time here after hours, when immersed in my sketching.”

“I can see why.  It's peaceful here.  Sounds like a nice way to wind down at the end of the day.”

Will had meant this, but he was also aware of a certain seductive ominousness in the large, yet embracing space of the office.  This was not a peaceful feeling, so why did the awareness only make Will find the place *more* enticing, more welcoming?

Hannibal gestured for him to sit, so he tried to actually sit rather than just falling into the embrace of a dark brown leather chair that made him feel so held and safe, it must belong to Hannibal. Of course his office was like this, an expression of his personality: mysterious, extravagant, creative, reflecting high intelligence.

Independent, pleased with himself, comfortable to be quirky and freely express those quirks as he chose.

The decor concept was a seamless blend of old-fashioned and modern, drenched in gorgeous art and stunning interior design, classy as could be. That was one of the first traits of Hannibal that Will had noticed when he had bothered to really look at the older man full-on. This was a guy who not only preferred, but insisted and thrived on having what he considered the highest quality choices, in all areas of life. Will stood out like a sore thumb on the list of Hannibal's interests or potential belongings.

Somewhere between that fateful first morning and right-now, Will had surrendered to the idea that Hannibal wished to possess him, while ceasing to find it offensive.

But then again, he'd been mulling it over longer than he had even realized. Until Hannibal mentioned the hour, he had thought it was still late afternoon. Where did *night* come from all of a sudden?

And. How was it, exactly, that Hannibal would love Renaissance art, paintings and sculptures of soft angels and sensuous nudes, all of this blatant but tasteful wealth and finery, then choose someone like *Will* to date? Not just dating, but offering to spoil and take care of Will.

He couldn't make the pieces match and slot together right, needed more information, more chances to observe Lecter, draw on his empathy to greedily learn all he could. But why expend the energy of trying to feel his way into Hannibal's heart when it was so fantastic that he *would* have to try in order to get his empathy to (perhaps) work? Hannibal scrambled the signal of Will's empathy to fellow humans' feelings, remaining slightly obscure even as his attentions were anything but.

"How do you usually wind down at the end of the day, Will?" Hannibal asked, bringing him a glass of dark red wine and handing it to him with graceful panache.

The chair seemed to be too big for Will, as if he'd sunk into it and been nearly swallowed, and Hannibal seemed even larger than before, taller and higher above him than was remotely possible. He ignored the sensation of having to stretch his arm up to take the glass of wine, knowing that it was being offered to him on a normal level, Hannibal barely even bending to hand it over. He was distressingly aware that he was getting used to the distortions and disturbances to reality which his mind kept making, more and more lately. Surrealistic improvisations were hardly needed in such an already-bizarre situation. He felt daunted and lost, but potentially found whenever Hannibal smiled at him; whenever their eyes met.

“Thank you.” Feeling like a little kid at the grown-ups table, he sipped his wine. It was, of course, splendid, spilling fruity, tart flavor over his tongue. He took another liberal sip, discovering that it began making him feel less tense.

He answered the previous question, “I have a little house out in Wolf Trap, Virginia. Rural, quiet, no close neighbors. Wide open spaces appeal to me. Peace and quiet. And, uh, I have my dogs to keep me company. Much as I’d like to do more at home, like work on some fishing flies, or tinkering with boat engines, or taking longer walks with the dogs, for a while now I’ve just been too tired. I find myself throwing the simplest dinners together and collapsing in bed before nine.”

He left out the times when he never even *had* dinner, just woke up in the middle of the night after a terrifying nightmare, no memory of falling asleep, sweat-soaked and starving in so many disturbing ways.

“Yet, while you are as stunning as ever, you don’t look like a man who’s had a restful night's sleep in the recent past.”

Will smiled irrepressibly into his wine glass and blushed darker. “Thank you for the compliment and for caring about, uh, me being okay. Haven’t had a good night’s sleep recently, no. I have dreams…although they seem more intense than regular ones. They have been getting more vivid, disturbing. Lots of waking up, back to sleep, rinse and repeat. This is amazing, by the way.” He nodded at the wine.

After five sips, his body was starting to soften in posture, still politely attentive to Hannibal, but less bolt upright, as he might run away, or just scream. And even the need to do either one, which had been almost irresistible when Hannibal first opened the door, was ebbing down to a bearable level, shrinking more by the moment.

“A favorite of mine. 2002 Domaine d'Auvenay, Cabernet Sauvignon. Not an especially impressive vintage, but the flavor is almost flawless.”

“How would a wine snob describe the flavor? If one were here?” Will asked, playfully.

The way Hannibal smiled while his eyes glittered in cinnamon-whiskey shades made Will glad he’d tried a bit of mischief, maybe *just* short of flirting. Unlike how he usually felt after taking a rare, conversational risk, (oversharing…venting…complaining…saying something too personal) Will didn’t immediately want to bite off his own tongue after speaking, or else stuff a bar of soap into his mouth.

“*If* a wine snob happened to be present, he would remark that while the taste is intense and complex, it also manages to be classic, jammy, and luscious. As if the vineyard’s fresh grapes were bursting on one’s tongue. He might use more florid and complicated vocabulary, to be honest, but I’m not in the mood for extra pretenses.”

“Just the usual pretenses?”

“Only in the sense that we are all somewhat on our guard, and in my case, hopeful of impressing someone special when an opportunity like this arises. I am also, according to

quite a few people, pretentious."

Hannibal scented his wine, lightly swaying the glass and its contents right under his nose as his eyes closed for a moment. Pleased, he smiled and took a sip.

"I'm glad to see you take that as a compliment. That people find you pretentious."

"Thank you." Amusement danced between them.

Will leaned forward thoughtlessly; Hannibal mirrored the move. "I mean that pretentious isn't, um. For most people, it's an annoying trait. I don't know how, but you make it seem charming."

Hannibal flushed pink. Will's toes curled in his plain, tan "teacher" shoes. When he looked up again, the older man's darkening gaze fell on him so intensely, he shivered again, but could not look away. He couldn't deprive Hannibal of staring at him, even staring as if Will was the most anticipated course of a five-course dinner he was looking forward to enjoying.

Hannibal's tongue darted out briefly, wetting his lips while he thought about something intently, before saying, "Would you like to know how much the wine cost, Will? I opened it specifically to share with you. I've had it in my wine cellar for a few years, and after we met, I started keeping it here in my office instead. I thought it would be a perfect wine for your first visit, whenever that might be."

Will raised his eyebrows. "Why offer to tell me what it cost?"

"Because sugar babies often find it satisfying, flattering, or even arousing to be told how extravagantly their daddies are spoiling them."

"Oh." Will hoped his eyes were not as saucer-huge as they felt, but there was nothing he could do to hide his own surprise or how totally out of his depth he was.

"It's too soon, I think." Hannibal smiled apologetically. "I will try to restrain my over-eagerness where you are concerned, Will. It would not be at all fair or appropriate to immediately jump into such things. We have some important matters to discuss first, primarily for me to ensure your comfort."

"Such things as?"

"I may be hopeful and highly aspirational towards the status, but I'm not your daddy yet. It's too soon for me to intentionally arouse you. I can clearly see that you're feeling overwhelmed and nervous. I intuit that you are most likely in quite a sensitive headspace that has spilled over to your physical reactions. Your nervous system is already sensitized enough and this totally new experience has heightened your reactions further. The last thing I want to do is invade that delicacy before we have established your preferences and limits and made a plan that best suits them."

"What if my preferences involved me *wanting* you to invade my delicacy?" Will marveled at his own boldness. He didn't have time to feel embarrassed before Hannibal answered.

Hannibal looked delighted. “That can be arranged, along with absolutely anything else I may do to give you pleasure and to take care of you.”

*Ohh, Jesus Christ.*

Will blurted, “I couldn’t call you because I hate talking on the phone. I wrote out god knows how many texts, but they all looked so stupid, I deleted them right after. And I couldn’t even bring myself to open my laptop and attempt emailing you; I was too exhausted by that point from repeated failure to launch. This was all just from being curious about you and your proposal. Finally, I found myself driving here. Now that I *am* here, I admit you have me a little more than curious.”

“Good.”

The one-word answer hit Will more strongly due to Hannibal’s usual proclivity for long, fancily-worded statements. He gripped the arms of the chair and managed a lop-sided smile, barely meeting Hannibal’s hungry gaze before tearing his eyes away.

“I keep coming back to…trying and failing to understand what you get from this. From being extraordinarily kind to me, for no reason that I can discern.”

“I *want* to show you kindness. I have never experienced such an overpowering desire to take care of another person as I felt the moment I set eyes on you. The wish has only grown over every intervening moment. And we’ve already established that a desire does not even have to be strong for me to give into it. I am undoubtedly an indulgent and pleasure-driven man. What you make me feel is heightening my own natural proclivities.”

“The other day…you startled me with what you offered, even though I thought you were sincere.”

“And so I was.”

“I couldn’t handle it at first, so…I lashed out at you a few times,” Will winced. “You didn’t deserve that.”

Hannibal shrugged lightly. “That did not, and does not bother me, Will. If you needed to vent your understandable frustrations at someone, I would never deny you that. I know I did not catch you on the happiest of mornings; you were upset when I approached you. I feel lucky that you heard me out, and to have had the chance to spend time with you, to begin getting to know you.”

Will felt himself sinking deeper into temptation and forgetting any remnant of common sense. Although it was an effort, he stood, pressing a hand to his still-hot forehead and then raking a hand through his curls as he began walking around the office.

“I didn’t come here planning to accept your proposal, Hannibal. I wasn’t entirely sure *why* I came, even as I started the drive.”

“It is more than enough for me that you are here.”

“That’s…an unusual sentiment. But you don’t seem put off by my weirdness. Like I do realize that pacing your office while you’re still sitting there is rude.”

“I realize that you can’t sit still right now. I could help you with that, but it is…”

“Too soon.” Will nodded. *Help him?* What would that involve?

He paused by one of the bookshelves, glancing distractedly at the row of gem-toned, leather-bound editions of literary classics. He was surprised to find them not all psychological books, but then, the office was so immense, and there was another long row of bookshelves above his head. Perhaps Hannibal had room for all sorts of subject matter, from stories to art, history, and his professional interests. So eclectic, and yes, constantly so indulgent. That made sense and reminded Will why he was increasingly drawn to the man.

“Your strangeness does not bother me, any more than being strange myself does.”

Will laughed and it came out louder than intended, making him blush. “That sounds like a luxurious way to be.”

“Come,” Hannibal said flirtatiously, “Join me.”

Will bit his lower lip, hand tightening on the bookshelf he had been mindlessly palming. “I never put much thought into my sexual orientation. I’ve only been with women. But on the other hand, being with a man had never occurred to me. So I can’t say that I ever thought it was impossible, or anything.”

“Does being with a man occur to you now?”

With a laugh that might have verged a little too close to panic, Will kept pacing. “It does -- but I don’t want to lead you on. Curiosity does not indicate my long-term interest, or that I can give you...whatever it is you’re looking for.”

“Curiosity is sufficient for the time being. I accept it as a gift, one that makes me quite happy. Your mere existence makes me feel joy, not only desire. Aside from that, a sugar arrangement has no reliance on you satisfying *me*, quite the opposite.”

“The idea is that by satisfying *my* whims, you find your own pleasure,” Will replied, essentially summarizing what he had thus-far gleaned from Hannibal’s explanations. “Which sounds inconceivable. But, er…not unappealing.”

This time, Hannibal grinned. “Excellent, Will.”

His compliments made Will feel so damn *good.* Will couldn't quite hide his reactions, knowing with some small mortification that his little, sharp intakes of breath and widening eyes were a dead giveaway to someone as observant as Hannibal.

“There’s nothing about me worth romanticizing, but if you like me well enough for who I already am, without embellishment, then okay, we can talk about terms.”

“Interesting. You mention romance, or at least idealizing you, which is to suggest as much. How do you know this isn’t almost entirely a sexual desire on my side?”

Will smirked. He felt himself glowing, as if the uncomfortable heat in his body had somehow gone from miserable to…well. Something kind of like what he imagined joy must be.

“Your manner. Your affect, I guess. I don’t think you lied when you said you didn’t want a fly-by-night seduction, but I also don’t get the impression that you only want me long-term as a potential lover.” Will was guessing, but he knew these were good guesses, going just by Hannibal's behavior.

“I’m glad you could see my honesty on that point.” Hannibal had his hands folded on his lap and his face lifted so that he could easily watch Will as the younger man walked around, never leaving his line of vision. “How could you tell that it runs deeper?”

“You wouldn’t care as much. Not even the amount of effort you’re putting in, it’s the way you respond to me. There’s something underneath that’s messy. Even an awkward feeling. You want to impress me, you second-guess yourself at times. It’s a neat mess as far as messes go, but it’s there. At least, I think it is.”

“I would usually be quite resistant to the depth with which you see me. But since it’s you, I don’t mind. And still, if it were not you, I highly doubt the perception would be so sharp and deep-delving.”

“I’m not trying to impale you on the spike of my perceptions, Dr. Lecter.” Will rested a hand on his chest and smiled. He fluttered his lashes, then wondered where *that* came from. “I promise.”

“I trust you implicitly.” Hannibal gestured with his own nearly empty glass and offered, “More wine?”

“I shouldn’t,” Will sighed. “I still have to drive home. Plus, there’s work in the morning.”

“I can drive you home, if you wish. I’m not feeling the effects of a single glass.”

“Don’t you want another glass?”

“I would abstain so that you may have another. But first, I feel I must ask if you have eaten. Lunch…dinner?”

“What are those?” Will croaked a weak laugh. “I definitely had breakfast. I remember because it was the last of the Corn Flakes. They were extra-crumbly.”

“No Apple Jacks today?”

Will almost giggled. Which he hadn’t done since maybe the age of six.

“What? Oh, no, Apple Jacks are just for *special* occasions,” he said, suppressing the laugh but hitting a particular note of little-kiddish self-importance all the same. His lashes did another coquettish flutter that was entirely instinctive.

Hannibal briefly closed his eyes, looking as if he might be requesting strength from his chosen deity.

“You are going to turn my hair to silver entirely, I can already tell. Did the cereal at least have fruit in it, or was it accompanied perhaps by some protein. Bacon, sausage?”

“I had coffee?”

“I see.” Hannibal was subtly, but unmistakably pained. “How many glasses of water did you drink today? And I won’t let you off with a ‘what’s water?’ Darling, we can’t have you not taking care of yourself like this, I’ll worry about you to the point of distraction.”

Will felt a tremor of confused bliss quivering through him from Hannibal’s concern, his attitude that Will’s health and well-being were a priority, as if it was obvious to anyone.

Sinking back into his chair, he rubbed the knees of his khakis and admitted, “I really have no idea how much water I drank today. Genuinely. I’m sorry?”

“You look as if it has been too long, and I gather from what you said that there was no lunch, no dinner as yet.” Hannibal stood and crossed over to Will’s chair, leaning down to take his hand and rub his thumb softly over it. “Please, let me take you to dinner, my dear.”

Before Will was ready, Hannibal had released his hand, only because he found it imperative to get a chilled bottle of fancy spring water from the office mini-bar that was almost obscured by all of that art and all of those books. One didn’t make much notice of the glass panel in one bookcase that had bottles behind it, ice for drinks and some small bottles of water sitting on the ice. It only looked like one more small masterwork of decor, especially as Hannibal’s liquor bottles were of the kind of vintage to be aged and lovely-looking.

When Hannibal handed him the water, Will obediently took a sip. The swallow took some effort, the cold liquid harsh in his hot throat. Why was he burning up all over like this? Was he sick? Was it Hannibal getting him worked up? Or both?

He didn’t want to get Hannibal sick by giving him whatever ailment he might have, but on the other hand, he kept doubting if it *was* an illness. This was not like any cold or flu he could ever recall having. It was a totally different thing, all shaky, hot, wavering nervousness, memory lapses, dreams that hit too hard and held him too tightly. How could that be contagious? He didn’t want to think about what might be wrong with him if that nagging worry that it was serious was correct, and these symptoms didn’t suggest a simple reason.

Will couldn’t figure it all out at once. And he knew Hannibal was waiting on an answer about going to dinner…

“I…we can go eat, I guess. I have to head home right after, my dogs will need me in the morning.”

“I will still drive you home after dinner,” Hannibal insisted. “You should relax. I have a hired driver on call 24-7. He can return your car to you by morning and you will be all set to use it for work. Shall we?”

He went and got Will's coat, holding it up expectantly. Will came over gingerly and let the older man put the coat on him, as if he weren't perfectly capable of doing it himself. He felt coddled, with the impression that Hannibal liked that most of all, the two of them pretending that Will needed to be constantly looked after, made a priority. Treated like a "prince," as Hannibal had actually said last time. This was so wild, it made Will's day job and mysterious, sweaty ailment seem almost normal by comparison.

"Hannibal?" Will blinked up at Hannibal with doe eyes. "Why the whole sugar dating thing? Why not just ask me out?"

"I think that starting out in this way is what we probably both need the most right now. I would like for you to feel that there's a guiding structure at work, providing the security of knowing what to expect, and for you to gradually become more comfortable asking for what you want. Accepting it. Meanwhile, my craving to spoil you has become nearly all-consuming, and I would love to get started, if it suits you as well."

Will nodded slowly. "I'm just going to take you at your word about, uh, the craving. To avoid the whole fishing for compliments thing."

"You never have to wait long to hear compliments from me, my beautiful boy." Hannibal briefly cupped his face, and Will almost got up the nerve to press against it, into that warmth.

He could barely stop himself from closing his eyes, too, which felt perilously vulnerable. They stayed open, but his lashes drifted halfway down and the desire to just fade into Hannibal's care was palpable. Sweeter, more appetizing than whatever was going to be for dinner.

Beautiful boy…the words circled around and around his consciousness. He'd never been called that. Handsome, nice-looking, every now and again, and he assumed people were just being polite. It had been that way since he was a kid. But beautiful, said with such sincerity, that was completely different.

And "*boy*." Because if Will wanted this, then he wouldn't have to worry about being an adult when they were together. He could just be *Hannibal's boy.* A good boy. *Daddy's…*

Oh, God, too much-*too much*…if someone asked him a week ago, whether he would ever be this tempted to intimacy with another man, and if he would want to call the man *'daddy,'* he'd have thought they were crazy. Apparently not…at all. He felt sleepy, light on his feet, heart speeding and pounding. So many feelings that didn't seem to go together and wouldn't quit.

Hannibal wore a self-conscious version of his handsome smile. "Forgive me the lapse into overly personal pet naming, but you truly are outstandingly pretty. I may be falling a little too far into the idea of you being mine before we have fully decided what we are doing. I do know that good things come to those who wait."

"You aren't used to waiting for what you want, though," Will suggested.

It was an educated guess. Hannibal's emotions were an intriguing entity to him, half-exposed and softly displayed one moment, then covered back up and barely comprehensible the next.

Will stared down at Hannibal's strong, capable hands as they *buttoned up his coat.* Seriously? Still, to his continued bafflement, Will couldn't say he didn't like having Hannibal doing these things for him, getting all close with his warm body and spicy, sensuous cologne, his solicitous smiles that felt private, maybe even a side of Hannibal no one else got to see. What could be more flattering?

All of this piled up in Will's restless thoughts until he suddenly had to know if this was about (potentially) a real, romantic relationship, or some kind of friendship with benefits where Hannibal spoiled him and he let Hannibal have time with him in return, or was it all just a game? It sure was an exorbitant form of role-play for Hannibal, if so.

He chewed his lip and asked, "Does sugar dating rule out a traditional relationship? Does it stay a business sort of arrangement where there's no, I don't know…future of… regular couple-things?"

"It can be whatever we want it to be, Will. I don't see why I should have to choose between being your sugar daddy and eventually – if I should be incredibly fortunate – your devoted lover. This beginning won't prevent us from becoming more, and becoming more does not mean I'd ever wish to stop caring for you in just the same way. Let's go and have a lovely meal, darling, and we'll decide how you would like that care to play out."

Will had no idea what he was doing and kept leaning into Hannibal's strength, his persistent affection and eagerness, that indomitable confidence that seemed to pull Will in like a hug that went on and on, warm, protective and safe. That…and a little sexy, too. He was still puzzled over why it had taken this long, almost to the end of his thirties, for him to think about being with a man.

Hannibal finished fastening his own coat and held the door open for Will with a courteous smile.

Will paused for a moment and gave him a shy smile.

"You shouldn't worry. About the silver hair thing, I mean. If more comes. The little bit of it you already have looks…really good."

He moved on quickly, walking ahead for just a few moments because looking at whatever expression Hannibal might be wearing right then felt too overwhelming. There was a smile on his own face, too, and warmth flooding his chest.

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By this time, although pretending otherwise, Hannibal already knew exactly where Will lived and most of his hobbies. He had been able to dig up some interesting information about Will's past as well, including the boy's previous job as a police officer in New Orleans.

He was vehemently glad that Will had abandoned that job: it had been even more dangerous than working for Jack Crawford profiling killers, and it was so far away that Hannibal doubted they'd ever have crossed paths.

This was a former possibility that didn't matter, obviously. Will was there, he was right nearby in Wolf Trap, and when Hannibal considered driving to Louisiana, a mere hour and a half between Baltimore and his beloved's snug, rustic cabin seemed like a stone's throw. He had to stop himself from thinking what would have happened to either of them if they never met. It was distressing, even painful, and the strength of his emotions – so soon, so quickly – threw him entirely. Hannibal didn't yet know this new version of himself, but he was far too wrapped up thoughts of Will to care about that as much as he probably should.

He had driven by Will's house late at night after their first meeting, simply because he found himself surprisingly unable to go home without somehow being closer to the young man again.

To carry out a personal investigation of someone who greatly interested him was nothing new to Hannibal, it was merely a common-sense procedure. He enjoyed having the upper hand and never being surprised by any hidden features or schemes that others might hold when interacting with him.

For individuals he disliked and had marked for death, then a delicious recipe from his eclectic repertoire, Hannibal would get to know their routine, just as he was getting to know Will's. But it was splendid to be following someone for such a totally different reason. This made Hannibal realize it had been a few years since he had stalked anyone from romantic or sexual interest, and even in those previous cases, he had discovered aspects about them that soured him on the potential relationship. It had been easy to let them go, to stop following them even when it was somewhat entertaining. He had been relieved that it went no further, in the end.

Conversely, Hannibal did not have the self control to stop stalking Will, but better that than losing control enough to approach the boy in person too soon, or in too aggressive a manner.

He would have to let himself have these stolen hours of following Will, watching his house, scouring the internet for his past. Every little piece of Will he discovered was another priceless treasure, far more precious than even his own eloquent and large vocabulary (in several languages) could have expressed. How could he help becoming rapidly addicted to finding out more and more, when everything he found out – instead of turning him off and consequently away – only made him fall even harder?

Hannibal had a natural pleasure in learning more about those who enticed him in one way or another. But this was normally an inclination which he unfurled slowly, meticulously. On rare days when he felt pessimistic, he thought of this as "waiting to be disappointed."

Midnight "drive-bys" were more the territory of desperate stalkers. He could admit to himself that he enjoyed subterfuge, often achieved by following people without their knowledge and prying into their affairs without permission, even taking deliberate action to toy with their life and their fate, help or hurt them for nothing more than his own amusement. However. He had never been *desperate* before; in fact, he had never even been particularly serious about anyone else who had caught his interest.

There was no way to play with Will and pretend he wasn't just as lost, equally caught up.

So, perhaps the only sensible solution within his reach was to steal small tastes where and when he could get away unseen. It had been paramount to let Will come to him before going further. Had Will not eventually contacted him, perhaps by at least a month from the first day they met, Hannibal would have had no choice but to adopt drastic measures. Because he would never be satisfied with any kind of one-sided affection, he was incapable of trying to trick Will into his arms and into his control. If he wanted to get into Will's vulnerable mind and twist the thoughts within, then yes, he could have Will at his disposal. Easily. But he hated the thought.

It actually turned his stomach to consider, as he must consider all possible avenues, manipulating Will into thinking he wanted him. He realized then that he needed Will to *genuinely* want him with equal fervor. And if he found with time that this could not be achieved, he did not feel up to having Will out there in the world while he remained intensely, constantly *aware* of it, and of never being able to have the boy.

Violence might be the only resolution if they could never be mutually entrapped in this powerful emotion. In that event, he would only look forward to, and deeply enjoy, a last and thorough taste of Will, knowing how sharp and devastating the fall to grief would be afterwards. He was not at all sure that the feelings would balance, or that one full experience of Will's taste could make up for the loss of him.

Thus, he was able to determine with his usual careful thought, but *without* anything like the usual calm way he felt afterwards, a few essential details. He wanted Will Graham and had no intention of letting him go once he did have the boy. However, Will had to wander freely into his grasp and remain there with a deepening affection which bore promising signs of attachment, leaving the power in Hannibal's hands as much as was possible, given the alarming strength of his feelings towards Will.

If he could not have Will of Will's own volition, it would be intolerable to move on as if that was fine, *worse* than intolerable to imagine that someone else might have Will. He would have to render it impossible for anyone else to make Will love them.

There was absolutely no point in deceiving himself that he felt less than he did. The danger in that was much larger: it would make him impulsive without at all being able to predict his own actions. His emotions on this subject were already so far out of his previously modulated comfort zone that it would be madness to invite in more potential for instability.

He settled upon this trajectory of conclusions, ideas and possible solutions and laid the matter to rest in his own mind, for the time being. He knew what he would do in any of the possible outcomes of knowing Will Graham. He was clear on the methods he would use to implement his chosen strategy when and if it became necessary. In the meantime, there was no need to deny himself the basic but potent bliss of finding out every possible morsel about Will that could be taken without the boy noticing his behind-the-scenes movements.

All of this had been thought through, wrestled with and resolved in his mind and heart while he sat parked on the road near the end of Will's driveway, the Bentley concealed by trees in the black of night. He watched the fluctuations within the house from this distance, able to

see that Will had likely gone to bed early, only to get up in the middle of the night. The light going on at 12:30am could have few other interpretations. Was Will reading in bed, or in a chair by the fireplace (he noticed a chimney, and who would have a fireplace without an accommodating reading-chair nearby it? Yet the chimney remained dormant.)

Or was Will more the type to seek a midnight snack? He created a theoretical blueprint of the house's inner layout, landing on the intriguing result that Will had probably been sleeping in an open-plan living room on the first floor. His architectural expertise predicted a second-floor bedroom, which remained dark the entire time. Had Will fallen asleep in his living room, or did he always sleep down there? How very interesting.

*Unique, incomparable, beautiful boy.*. How could he help fantasizing that *he* was there, inside the house, making Will an elaborate, gourmet snack to make sure his perfect boy was well fed in every sense of the word? He would watch Will happily eating the meal, then take his darling back to bed to exhaust him thoroughly, making sure his body had no choice but to fall back into a sumptuous and deep, restful slumber.

He finally had to drive home lest he make the mistake of falling asleep, then being caught when morning came. On the way back to his now lonely feeling house, every aria, every symphony on the radio seemed to be all about Will, predicting the epic glories of their love. He would have felt exhausted by the emotional storm of it all, except that it was so *exciting*, so soul-elevating.

Hannibal found only a few hours' fitful sleep, interspersed with romantic dreams of Will finally having discovered his repressed bloodlust, hunting by his side. He dreamed of the kisses they'd share, their lips shining in the savage red drip of tearing into their fallen prey. When Will was ready, they'd share everything together.

Daytime was unsurprisingly more challenging to endure. Work had been unusually dull, making him question his past wisdom in even taking a few of his clients on. Their problems were so tiresome, whereas he loathed what was common and had tried to cultivate a slate of regular patients who could keep him on his toes, at least to a decent extent.

While he listened to his patients blathering about their so-called problems, he feigned decent attentiveness and fought the urge to absent-mindedly sketch Will based on his memory of meeting him, of their first little almost-date. And of course, that memory was supplemented by the gorgeous images he had found online of a younger Will in a police uniform, proud but demonstrably self-doubting, and a few years after, at his masters' degree graduation, giving the camera a bemused half-smile. Alone, always alone. But who had been taking the pictures? This, he intended to find out. Another photo of Will, quite recently, helping out at a charitable event for a local dog shelter, holding a puppy in each arm, and also wearing a small, forced smile that let Hannibal know that on this occasion, he had tried to get out of being photographed for the news article.

Will had given in, though. Because he always thought other people's wishes were more important than his own preferences. How dare anyone else impose upon this beautiful, ethereal creature? Hannibal had never wanted to spoil anyone like this; he wanted to know *everything* that aroused Will, delighted him, made him feel at home and in a complete state of trust, he wanted Will never to doubt -- never ever to hunger for affection again, for the rest of

his life.  He also knew that Will barely even understood what he wanted, or the pleasure he could feel, the depth, the intensity, and that knowledge absolutely *tormented* him with lust. With *need* and a hunger he believed to be the only one capable of satiating Will's own.

How Will would blush someday, finding that Hannibal longed to sketch him in all manner of compromising positions, seldom with clothing involved. He could hardly wait to begin showering Will with all the love which he had apparently held within, pent up for so many years until he had set eyes, at last, on the only one worthy to receive it.

While congratulating himself on prevailing in the considerable, if temporary, effort of lingering in the shadows a little longer until Will chose a method by which to contact him, Hannibal remained confident he would be a strong enough lure to bring Will to him once again.

He could not have predicted, however, that another stroke of luck was about to bring them closer, sooner than he would have otherwise, reasonably, expected.

Chapter End Notes

I think of this Hannibal as being the same as season-1 Hannibal, *but* without his self-sabotage mode switched on.

**Next time:** A romantic dinner date and a first kiss 🌹🖤

# nothing to be scared of

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"*Worryin' that I might drive the nail into the coffin*
*I've got my own patterns maybe, I can stop them*
*Holdin' tight to who you are like someone's gonna take it*
*Bubble wrap around your heart like someone's gonna break it*
*Demons in your mirror together, we'll escape them*" -Kasey Musgraves

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Will woke with a startled yelp a half hour later, and thank God Hannibal had stopped the Bentley at a red light. Because a firm hand on his shoulder was about the only thing keeping him from slamming right into the dash with the force of that nightmare breaking.

"It's alright, Will," Hannibal said, *under*-reacting, why wasn't he annoyed and freaked out? Instead, he kept his tone low and soothing, just like his touch on Will's strained, tense shoulder, like his coffee-light eyes studying the road ahead. "You're safe."

He had an opportunity to turn from his straight-ahead view and gawk at Will, but he ignored that option to give Will comfort and space to recover at the same time.

Will shivered harshly and fought tooth and nail against the urge to rub his cheek against Hannibal's hand, to close his eyes and imagine how safe he could feel here as if it would last. Knowing better, he couldn't stand falling prey to such rawness in the moment. Whenever Will blew it and this whole weird, amazing thing between them ended, he'd prefer to have fewer embarrassing lapses into neediness to remember. He'd better narrow down the numbers while he could; he had already given in too many times and they barely even knew each other yet.

That wasn't quite true…Hannibal knew too much about him, and he knew almost nothing about Hannibal.

*Or* his understanding of Hannibal might be just fine, even better than most astute individuals. But not up to par with his normal abilities to empathize and profile. He was willing to bet that most people would never guess how pleasant he found it to sink into the dominating and protective presence of a man he could not immediately, entirely understand. A man who he could get to know through time and experience, maybe even intimacy. With Hannibal, the submission he felt by default around others became a privilege and a treat.

With Hannibal, Will didn't want to hide, but to be slowly, surely drawn out.

He had been accused of being arrogant and controlling in the past, by fellow students at the FBI Academy and his instructors, later by colleagues and even Jack. People characterized Will as always needing to possess the greater power in any interpersonal dynamic and then of

lording that victory over others. Why couldn't anyone seem to understand that Will didn't want power, he just wanted to be able to *breathe?*

Will never felt safe, he never *asked* for this empathy overdrive constantly giving him this mythical "power." Sure, sometimes he thought he'd love to know what it felt like to have power and control, but on further reflection even *that* sounded exhausting. Ironically, it was his pushy classmates and colleagues, then the imposing Jack Crawford who truly thrived on authority and domination. How did a textbook definition wallflower of the shrinking violet variety get a reputation for being a power-hungry manipulator? Apparently, all you had to do was be too good at your damn job and scare pretty much everyone who met you.

And he was expected to *magically know* how to only use his empathy when other people wanted him to, in the exact *ways* in which they felt it was permissible. Usually? His empathy was a shield. It kept people incapable of hurting him, unable to see him fully, it kept everyone at bay, perceived potential enemies. He didn't know what he'd do if it turned out that his worst paranoia was true -- that *he* might be the only real enemy, to others and to himself. Will knew his dreams and secret fantasies of murder had never been normal even before the latest influx of disturbingly gruesome nightmares.

"Safe." Will repeated the word out loud to see how it felt. The one-syllable concept suddenly seemed to have taken on a new meaning altogether.

“It’s also alright not to be okay.” Hannibal’s brow furrowed in slight concern, nothing dramatic but enough to remind Will he was a focal point, for the first time in he had no idea how long – not because of his empathetic skill set, not for his uncanny profiling gift, not because he’d ruined some kind of social gathering, special occasion, delicate or quiet time with one of his quirks, break-downs, or other problems. Because he was *here*, that was all Hannibal needed to keep that gentle, yet intense focus on him.

For a few minutes, slow and painful ones, Will had been totally caught up in the remaining pull of the dream trying to coax him back into the blood-splattered darkness. That pull now battled with his desire to indulge what Hannibal wanted and get intimate, letting his own emotions dictate his choices. He didn’t know much about this “sugar” relationship bit, but he had caught on that the premise relied on Hannibal spoiling him. Funny, that there was such an unexpectedly large part of Will wanting to reciprocate. And a shame, seeing as he had less than nothing to give…but he couldn’t deny to himself, whatever was left of him, he wanted nothing more than to let Hannibal have it.

With all these thoughts running ragged circles around his mind, Will’s view of the road had been a mere blur of shadows, despite the pristine state of the windows. He didn’t have a clue where they were; could be literally anywhere within thirty minutes of Hannibal’s office and there were plentiful directions to take from there. So, he’d missed the part where they’d arrived Somewhere, only piecing that together when Hannibal, still wearing that soft look of worry, turned into a parking lot.

There was a valet, but Hannibal nodded politely with a small wave to decline their services. The rain had let up, leaving shining puddles filled with light and leaves who had been deprived of their color in the process, becoming a pile of dull brown where that very morning they were probably crisp yellow, bright orange and siren red.

The man beside him made Will feel supported even at his weakest, without inspiring his automatic pulling-away in humiliation for showing his "crazy" too much. He offered Hannibal a wobbly semblance of a smile in gratitude and shook his head.

"I'm sorry, wish I could tell you that was an infrequent occurrence on my part."

"And which occurrence is that?"

Hannibal pulled into a spot near an impressive, historic-looking building that must be the restaurant. From here, Will could make out banana yellow paint and white trim, plus a front porch. Maybe a genuine original Victorian, unlike the plentiful fake ones that had been built in this region during the 60's and '70's. Those were colors like bubblegum or eggplant and kind of reminded Will of someplace that a sitcom family or obnoxiously optimistic hippie types would live. This was different, like stepping back in time. If the paved lot and cars hadn't been present, Will could imagine stagecoaches, long swirling dresses in the damp night breeze, top hats removed on the way inside to warm up by the fire.

Hannibal paused with the car in park, letting the engine run to keep the heat on. Granted, it was hard to know what temperature Will would benefit from since he was sweating profusely and shivering at the same time (the good ol' Will Graham special lately). But he preferred the warmth, finding that the sweat glossing his over-sensitized skin and matting his curls to his aching brow was once again a cold one.

"Sorry. I just –" Will groaned, then bit his lip, overcoming a sharp punch of self-hatred to his own stomach before continuing, "I was in the middle of trying to apologize for falling asleep in the car and treating you to one of my delightful night terrors, only to get so absorbed in the setting that I lost the end of the goddamn sentence."

"That's perfectly fine, my dear." Hannibal undid his seatbelt, then turned to face him, as if staying boxed into the driver's seat with his wide shoulders and fancy clothes rather than going inside was also fine and he could hardly be more delighted about it.

*Grateful* for Will's presence even when anyone else would be longing to get out, stretch their legs and then go in to eat. It was getting close to nine, for Christ's sake.

"Don't you believe me?" Hannibal reached over and brushed Will's hair back behind one ear, then cupped his face.

He couldn't help giving in, despite the sad fact of someone so elegant getting Will's sweat on their fingers on top of everything else he had already done to mess up the evening.

"I don't doubt the sincerity of your apologetic sentiment merely because you can't help your own nature. And while I don't need a 'sorry,' it charms me that you were polite enough to say it. Of course you can't help drifting off, sweetheart. You're so far beyond tired that I don't even know if I'm right to bring you inside for a solid meal, or if sleep is your more immediate need. Perhaps it would be wisest to bring you to a walk-in clinic, or–"

"Please, no," Will winced. "I'm fine for dinner and I mean, it's gotta do some good. I haven't been eating consistently and what I've been randomly shoveling in has not exactly been

nutritious. Fuck. I'm such a wreck. I can't believe I foisted my company on you when I'm obviously unwell. It's rude to expose you to whatever this is, though I didn't think it was contagious. Truth is, I barely thought about it until now and now all I can think is what if I get you sick after all you've done for me? A sorry-ass 'thank you' even by my standards."

Hannibal nodded periodically through this sad speech, then the upward tug of his lips surprised the younger man.

"You're smiling," Will pointed out, knowing the smile to be sincere, not the product of pity like when most people smiled at him.

Those smiles usually looked creepy, resembling masks. Not Hannibal, though. A smile was the only thing Will could imagine brightening up that face and making it even more handsome. His amber eyes shone with enthusiasm and his occasional nervous fidgets, although small and extremely low-key, the quiet tapping on the wheel or moving closer just to inch back, proved the realness of the emotion.

He could sense the older man's happiness in his presence. It reminded him of smoothly rolling, dark ocean waves at night. The feeling didn't drown Will, but he had the strangest instinct telling him he might like it to.

"I'm not making fun of you, darling, if that's what you're afraid of." Hannibal went right back to touching Will's hair so attentively, like he could do just that all night and be happy.

"N-no," Will said with another shudder that thankfully didn't scare off the thick, warm fingers now embracing his face, caressing his ear. Stroking through his curls again.

It felt *so good*…thinking was a challenge. But Will managed, "no, when…uhhh, when it comes to you, that's not what I'm afraid of."

"Sometimes we fear letting ourselves have things," Hannibal suggested lightly. "That isn't always a bad sign. It might be more of an indicator as to how very much we're wanting something."

"It might be," Will said, ever so slightly nuzzling into the touch because he couldn't not, if Hannibal was gonna keep petting him like a newborn puppy. "But why do I get the feeling you don't usually fear letting yourself have anything? How often do you want something and not get it right away, even?"

"Under normal circumstances, you'd be quite right," Hannibal affirmed as they shared a smile this time. "But now…"

He bent his fingers and ran his knuckles softly back and forth across Will's cheek and jawline. "Now I'm worried about losing what I want at some unknown point in the future, particularly as I'm not at all confident that I'll develop the skill to accept it gracefully or healthfully between now and then. Will. You must know that even if you were contagious, I'd rather stay close to you and get sick than suffer through time without you."

"I mustn't know any such thing."

Hannibal traced the long line of his neck all the way from his jaw to his collarbones, still using his knuckles. Will quivered from surprised pleasure, instead of the hot chills of his post-nightmare state. Having a different, new reason to tremble was doubly exciting and nice because of how awful the familiar, every-day reasons were.

Rather than asking what the hell he meant, Hannibal tilted his head a bit to one side, now tracing the collar of Will's shirt where it was exposed beneath his unbuttoned coat.

Will elaborated, "You keep talking about your feelings for me as if they're a foregone conclusion, but I have no idea what either of us are doing. You…heh. Might need to keep me posted, or I might get lost.

"I didn't think I had been subtle," Hannibal confessed with a low, husky chuckle that could only be described as sexy.

"It's not that…you aren't subtle." Will laughed gently. "It's uh…more that… okay, I can read your emotions the same as anyone else's, but they don't scream at me and invade my headspace like other people. I have no idea why. So I know how you feel but I don't always know the thinking behind it."

"Because my emotions and desires aren't reaching into your brain to become uninvited guests, pushing your own wishes and reflections into the dustbin?"

"I've never had anyone describe me to me that well." Will's mouth hung slightly open for a few astonished beats.

That was when he realized how his heart was pounding, like the drum in a marching band in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, *way* too excited for a heart that only knew how to break.

"I'm incredibly pleased to know that my presence doesn't invade your peace. If it did, I promise I would try to find ways to change that."

"There's no peace in here," Will tapped his forehead ruefully. "Guess there never has been any. My dad always liked to remind me that I howled from babyhood almost right through to preschool. Always upset about one thing or another. Other kids let their teeth grow in without the neighbors complaining or threatening to call child services."

"If your father so frequently recited that speech to you, then having child services show up would serve him right." Hannibal's voice had gone stone-cold.

The idea of Hannibal being angry with Will's dad made the younger man feel that new kind of shiver again.

"I don't know why I started talking about that," he blurted, "I mean, logically, of course I *know,* but for god's – I never talk this much all at once unless I'm giving a lecture or yelling at someone to stop ignoring my hunches in the field."

“I could listen to you talk endlessly, subject unimportant. Whatever you need to get off your chest. It’s what I’m here for.”

Will blushed, if he *could* blush, given that he knew he was still slightly red in the face from the stupid dream and feeling feverish. Anyway his face got much hotter as he stared down at the arm rest between their leather seats. And he kind of wanted to cry or throw up or both, while confronting the reasons for the cacophony of feelings made him want to go back to sleep until he could wake up ordinary, with everything inside his head all sorted out.

“You seem like a guy who would normally use the valet.” A pathetic subject change, but Hannibal probably knew that Will simply needed one, and this would do.

“I wanted us to have a brief conversation to make sure you’re up to going in,” Hannibal explained, fingers dancing slowly on the back of Will’s bent head, playing with the curls there. He was lenient for the moment with Will avoiding his eyes. “I wouldn’t want to drag you into any experience you’re not up for. Especially since I don’t fully trust myself not to run headlong into selfishness, following my own wishes on what we should do.”

“I’m not sure we can *have* brief conversations,” Will reflected curiously. He looked up, finding Hannibal casting a sly smile at him. “I’m not making fun of you, either. Yes, you love to talk, but I don’t mind listening, and at least you make me feel like I have something of interest to say back.”

Hannibal answered this with a widening of his smile, which then faded back to solicitude as he examined Will. He pulled this off about as smoothly as a doctor could unofficially examine someone and not be a dick about it; that is, better than anyone else would have, in Will’s estimation.

“I can *see* you mentally cataloging my symptoms,” Will smirked sardonically, the bitterness all directed at himself. “Any diagnosis, Doctor?”

“I’m not qualified to make such a conclusion based on limited evidence. The symptoms which I’ve observed are difficult to discern from the exhaustion you’ve been under. Furthermore, they might be a sign of any number of maladies. An MRI would…”

Will groaned again and Hannibal laughed, “Would, I’m afraid, probably be the best course of action, so we can be sure. However, I am happy to treat you to dinner before you make any decisions about the matter. I can basically conclude that thinking this through on an empty stomach is imprudent, whatever your eventual choices.”

“Hmm.” Will finally returned Hannibal’s touch, only with a timid tug on the older man’s tie that hopefully seemed playful.

He’d meant it as playful, not as a plea for – whatever it was he seemed to want to beg for. Things he’d never experienced and had long since learned never to spend much time yearning after. Solace, comfort, love, security, all those golden dreams that he didn’t deserve to have come true.

Still, Hannibal's eyes lit up as if Will had just handed him a ticket to the opera in Florence and announced that a chartered flight awaited them.

So he dared to add, "you smell, um…really good. That's a nice cologne or aftershave, I mean."

Hannibal continued appearing like he was in heaven. "Thank you, Will. I'm happy you like it."

"Thank you for not complaining about my terrible Old Spice, probably made worse by the nightmare sweat at the moment."

"Well, luckily, the nightmare sweat is almost drowning out the Old Spice completely," Hannibal said in what might be the world's record weirdest thing to joke about. But really, Will had to admit, in his company, these *were* the jokes. It was good, *too good*, feeling like they could laugh about this stuff without Will himself ever being the joke.

He rolled his eyes, using faux-annoyance as an excuse to get out of the car. It wasn't the siren call of delicious cuisine making him hurry up, either. He could smell the most divine hints of savory, old Northeastern-style fall cooking from the restaurant, but his stomach only seemed to exist for being nervous and excited about Hannibal. And that was why he got out of the car so they could go inside. He might have genuinely wanted to kiss Hannibal Lecter right after his unofficial, possible sugar daddy made a bizarrely affectionate joke regarding his god-awful aftershave. And that would be something of a problem, since he had no clue how to kiss a man and no concept of what his heart would do if he liked it, given that it was already galloping at this rate from nothing more than a five minute chat in close quarters, a respite from the cold that had been at least as warm as any hearth inside the yellow building.

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"This is a genuine historic house," Will noted after allowing Hannibal to open the door for him.

Was it obvious that people often let doors slam in his face or swing back so they either almost hit him or actually did? He'd made his share of accidental enemies at the FBI. Plenty of folks resented his stubbornness and how ornery he got in the thick of an intense case. He could be remarkably unkind when his profiling details and recommendations went ignored, and the words which came flying out in those moments probably deserved a good door swing-slam to the face.

Maybe it wasn't obvious. For some reason, Hannibal had seemed surprised about most of Will's negative self-perceptions and experiences, as if there was no good reason for Will to be so down on himself. Opening doors, pulling out chairs and guiding him places by hand like, well somewhere between a parent and a servant, these were all acts that Hannibal did because to him, the obvious thing was that Will should have them.

He survived the latest round of hapless blushing and glanced around the welcoming front lobby, where, as he had expected, a fireplace crackled near the maitre d's station.

“It is genuine, and was built in 1841,” said Hannibal, touching Will’s elbow to carefully steer him aside right before a family entered the restaurant with a boisterous young son leading the way. The kid, too little to be out this late, bolted in exuberantly right before he got scolded by his parents, who had just caught up to him.

If Hannibal hadn’t moved him just in time, the door would have smacked Will hard in the back. A reminder that half the trouble he got into might be from his absent-mindedness, not just being an intolerable person to be around. But not in Hannibal’s adoring eyes.

Will let his fluttery feelings on the topic remain silent, but they probably shone through in his eyes, as Hannibal was doing that glowy look again, the one that seemed to happen when Will returned his admiration.

Hannibal left his hand on Will’s low back, and Will let him, wishing they could stay like that longer. He liked the feeling of getting this touch without having to ask for it, and that the incidental nature of it almost made it fly under the radar. It was too subtle for there to be a need to talk about it, but it meant a lot to Will. Who knew that a touch from the right person's hand could change so many things all at once?

“You come here often?” Will blinked around at the interior, feeling out of place in a room full of neat, elegant tables covered with ivory cloths and bathed in candlelight, waiters fluidly weaving between the tables with trays of turkey, mashed potatoes, roast beef, french onion soup.

To Will, it was a familiar kind of fare, but nothing like food where he was raised up. He lived between the North and South, sort of, and had grown up on Louisiana food, lots of Creole recipes.  Moving to Virginia had introduced him to more varied comfort food as it existed in states above them. Will enjoyed the food when he had any kind of palate for it, rarely as that happened. It just tasted different, not like growing up by the rivers, rescuing stray dogs and fixing people’s cars or boats, skipping school whenever he could get away with it, and coming home to his shadow of a dad.

Growing up, real good dinners were reserved for going out with other people who were treating, or for family gatherings that happened about once a year for Thanksgiving, or sometimes Christmas, rarely both. Jambalaya, beignets and shrimp po’boys could still bring Will back to those days like a time machine, but meatloaf and mashed potatoes were conveniently detached from any memories.

Hannibal nodded. “It’s an easy drive, only a slight diversion from home. The neighborhood is something of a non-entity connecting a nearby suburb to the city proper. And they remain open until midnight all week, so hurrying to get in for a late dinner is never a concern. I also thought the setting and cuisine might be what’s in order for your current plight, even without an official diagnosis.”

Will nodded, eyes widening as he wondered to himself if there existed any diagnosis that would fully contain his disastrousness.

The place was clearly way above Will’s pay grade, but he wasn’t feeling like a sore thumb because of any ostentatious elements. Conversation was quiet, as even the kid waiting behind

them to be seated had been shushed under threat of missing out on dessert. The boy was gonna be up to midnight at that rate, after eating sugar, but Will didn't feel much more sophisticated and clued-in by comparison. He guessed maybe twelve and thirty-seven years old weren't so far apart as it might seem, although having had no boyhood to speak of probably explained why Hannibal's "daddy"ing left Will feeling innocent and small.

Dinner with a friend was about as strange to Will as having a friend; meanwhile, being on sort-of a date was even more unexpected than being attracted (more and more) to a man.

The dark windows on each wall looked like portrait frames showing a rendition of some other world somewhere, black and unyielding but for the mingled moonlight and car headlights swooshing back and forth every now and again. The patrons mostly looked to be well-to-do folks like Hannibal, dressed expensively in business casual. The pristine fabrics and tailored cuts left no question that Will was the only one in the room not decked out in designer clothes.

Must be a popular after-work spot, Will reasoned. He saw tired faces melting into contentment as they tucked into the tempting array of food, and his stomach gave a plaintive rumble, finally remembering what its actual function was (not a haven for bundles of little, lost butterflies to go crazy en masse!)

It would have been easy to slip into a cloud of ASMR from the clinking of silverware and the glide of faint classical music tipping into the rustling fireplace like champagne spilled blithely from an absent-minded flute. But Will remained relatively grounded (for him) because he had the warm, light but steady feeling of unusual weight touching his back, and he was close enough to feel Hannibal's body heat and confirm his earlier theory that the older man must run naturally hot. He always seemed like an inviting furnace…in more ways than one.

Hannibal's hand placement was the only indication that they might be more than friends, but their togetherness certainly wasn't a habit they would be partaking in with moderation.

Why didn't it seem odd or uncomfortable to have just skipped over the "friends" part altogether? Maybe *that* was how people got into dating? Will certainly had no experience to tell him.

The pleased and proud way Hannibal stood beside him, expectantly eying the front podium in anticipation of being seated, made Will blank out on how scruffy he looked compared to not only Hannibal, but anyone else there (yes, even the kid had suspenders and a tie on, no wonder the outside world had diminished to an eerie memory of an obligation; he didn't think he'd ever seen so many exquisitely attired people on such a plain, previously uninteresting evening.)

Today had started out being just one more time he'd run away from work responsibilities knowing that a) he could get away with it and b) the work was nothing urgent and he could finish it more comfortably (if you could call it that) at home.

*Comfortably* usually meant "without being hassled." It never meant anything like this, being overwhelmed in the best way he'd never felt before, when Hannibal had barely begun to

lavish him in the type of spoiling which was apparently the plan. Will only had to say *yes,* and all of a sudden there…just wouldn't be any more plain, uninteresting, or even ordinary evenings at all.

"Can I even eat here without a tie?" Will whispered to Hannibal, patting himself down in a flurry of surging nerves and imposter syndrome at the sight of a hostess in a black vest, pearl necklace and black, ankle-length skirt returning to the greeting station and flashing them a beckoning smile.

He thought the crumpled, maroon tie from his morning lecture might still be tucked into one of his pockets. Whether it would improve his outfit would be up for debate, but at least he'd be able to meet the rules of the establishment.

"Will? You don't need a tie. You don't need anything but to be yourself. I promise, if we ever go somewhere with a more formal dress code, I'll tell you ahead of time."

"Would you enjoy buying me something to wear, too?" Will asked, curiosity absolutely slaughtering the metaphorical cat as he only realized what he'd asked a few seconds later.

He already sounded like some presumptuous little brat, it was insane. Probably so was he and so was Hannibal, and it was starting to seem to matter less with every minute of this borrowed heaven.

"Oh, yes, my dear boy." Hannibal spoke in smooth velvet tones with an even prouder smile beaming down on Will. "I would love that, and I hope you would as well. As a matter of fact, I should also very much enjoy dressing you myself, every single piece of your clothing and every accessory having been purchased by me, just for you."

"Really?" Will tried to be generous to himself and thought he hadn't actually squeaked the word…then the echo of his juvenile tone rang in his ears.

But Hannibal was still looking at him the same manner, ravenous, like he was starving any time he didn't have direct access to Will – his company, conversation, chances to sneak in a few touches – and an opportunity to stare to his heart's content.

The moment somehow enhanced the unreal sensation that their height difference was far more substantial than it was as Will seemed to regress, almost far enough back to remember hope being more than a sick, sick joke.

From this boyish vantage point, Will got an irresistible preview of what it would feel like, being dependent on Hannibal. Being claimed and even sometimes controlled. They hadn't talked about any dominant-submissive dynamics, so he wasn't entirely sure why his mind had gone there. But he really didn't hate the idea at all.

He drifted away on that internal tangent as Hannibal conversed with the hostess. Her chin-length blonde hair was a buttery shade, as all and all she seemed to match or even blend into the restaurant's aesthetic. Still, she had a certain boring comeliness and gave Hannibal a smile that seemed overly familiar and called him "Dr. Lecter," but had gray eyes that glittered

as if they said *"Hannibal"* just to try it out and see how it sounded, how probably-her-favorite-patron reacted.

And – not coincidentally – Will wasn't inclined to like her, preferring to tune the whole interaction out until they got to their table and he could have Hannibal's attention all to himself again. He had been wrapped up so beautifully in fantasies of what might lay ahead and the last thing he wanted was some intruder breaking the delicate, gossamer thread of that hope. Which was just silly, but no less potent a feeling.

*Little brat indeed.*

"Thank you ever so much, Pamela," Hannibal said when Will let the tail end of the conversation come back onto his tuning frequency.

The soft din of everything and anything else in the room, which had formed a welcome smothering influence to avoid hearing Pamela, eased down to background noise as Will adjusted his attention from willfully blurring to sharply honed on his own focal point: Hannibal.

Although the hostess still had the nerve to stand there reciting the night's specials from memory as if that was so impressive, Will was comforted by how Hannibal's gaze remained fixed on him. It seemed like Hannibal was watching how Will reacted to the choices of food, so he mentally splashed water on his face to try and pay better attention. His skin buzzed from being guided and faintly touched by Hannibal, on his elbow, his arm, his low back, taking him to this table which was so tucked into the rear of the room that Will knew Hannibal had requested such a location, understanding Will would be more relaxed there.

He still felt all those little brushes from long, clever fingers and capable, confident palms, like he was covered in fingerprints just from Hannibal pulling out his chair for him and providing completely unnecessary guidance into the chair, as if Will might topple over at any moment.

It should offend him, almost to be infantilized, and hell, maybe he should be outraged, given his upbringing of plain, rigid Southern pride in being humble and never to rise above his "place" in life. No doubt, that place had originally been "the wrong side of the tracks." Instead, he found the experience indescribably flattering and dazzling. It was enough to make him wish there could be some kind of mark on him proclaiming that he belonged to Hannibal so that no one else would dote on the doctor and bestow syrupy compliments when Will was right there. Having never belonged to anyone before, barely even to himself, since it was often hard tracking himself down inside, it made a dorky, stupid grin briefly flitter across his face.

"You are smiling so beautifully, my dear," said Hannibal admiringly as the blonde bitch finally disappeared back into the ephemeral ether where she belonged. "Yet I suspect that a fondness for baked brie with fresh berry compote, cinnamon-roasted butternut squash and apples, seared duck breast, and beef ragu over pasta with truffled pecorino may not be the reason."

“Is…that what you ordered?” Will came back down to earth with the realization of having spaced out where he should have contributed ideas.

“I wanted to put an order in as soon as possible and knew Pamela would eagerly accommodate, despite the management’s discouragement of speedy ordering and ordering from the hostess in general. It may be several more minutes before our waiter arrives and you’re clearly famished.”

Will’s eyes darkened at the mention of Pamela and Hannibal stared into that darkness as if he would gladly delve all the way in, inescapably deep, into parts of Will where the profiler feared going even when he was alone.

“I suppose that is a frequent occurrence for you,” he noted, sitting stiffly and hating his suddenly haughty tone of voice. He didn’t seem to be able to control what jealousy drove him to, even such a micro-incident of it. “Having exceptions made for you in high-end places. Even in a special place, you’re extra special. Can’t blame everyone around you for seeing it and bending over backwards at the merest hint that you might have a need.”

“I’ve never even considered dating her,” Hannibal said in response to Will’s indirectly expressed, passive-aggressive, *absurd* jealousy. “I’m sure she may have some little crush on me, as many do, but I seem to have surrendered to a strange new…*vision problem*. I hope I won’t need to go to my optometrist for advanced examinations.”

“You’re dealing with a visual impairment?” Will smirked.

Hannibal’s attention and flirtation were a perfect distraction from anything else, even his own neuroticism. And his heart had apparently decided that it would simply keep growing, plump with unearned love and praise, until it inevitably outgrew his ribcage and burst out of his chest in a scene worthy of an Alien movie. In the movie, hadn’t that happened at dinner, too? He could only hope his own heart explosion remained suppressed until he was alone again. Then, it was almost safe to let some of his feelings flow freely.

“The impediment is quite dreadful, and what’s worse, I find myself enjoying the problem more than is entirely appropriate.” Hannibal leaned in slightly across the small table, brushing the side of his hand against Will’s for a suspended few moments. “You see, I can’t seem to notice a single other person in the room except for you.”

*Dizzy.* Again. *Say something.*

“*Me*. I’m wearing a shirt from Sears and jeans from LL Bean. I just almost broke the seatbelt in your Bentley while violently lurching out of an abnormally all-consuming nightmare, and admit it. The one thing you think I need almost as much as a head scan is a haircut.”

“*You.* Quite specifically you. I’m beginning to doubt that anyone else shall preoccupy me, ever again. And by the way, with such gorgeous, natural curls, you don’t need frequent haircuts. To keep them too short would be an absolute crime against beauty itself. At present, they look luscious, but when it’s time I’ll be happy to bring you to my barber for a trim. And…

I would like to bring you to a few of my favorite clothing stores with in-house tailoring services. But I'm not currently pressed on the subject, given that when someone looks like you, it truly doesn't matter what you are wearing. No one else is going to merit a comparison. There is simply you, and then the rest of humanity, and nothing in common between the two. Anyone with sense must be looking at me with jealousy at the moment."

Will stared at him almost aghast, then Hannibal nudged a glass of ice water (which had apparently been delivered during their conversation) closer to his "darling boy" with a devilish smile that probably should have been illegal. And yet his eyes remained soft, like the looser fringe of his end-of-the-day hair, no longer slicked back. His appearance mildly reflected his defenseless attitude, and it looked so damn perfect on him.

"If you drink your water, I may decide to let you have some of the lovely champagne which I also ordered." Hannibal waited a patient few seconds for Will to finish choking down the oversized, pounding heart which had just leapt into his throat and begin drinking his ice water like a good boy.

"God, that tastes better than water should," Will announced after drinking half of it (absent-mindedly, he registered that the glass was an actual crystal goblet, decorated around the rim and stem with a cranberry-hued etching that reminded him of how snowflakes would look catching on a windowframe and gradually thawing from unique, delicate patterns to reluctant dew. If, that is, the snowflakes were made of blood rather than ice). "I didn't realize my throat was so dry."

Hannibal stared at a slow rivulet of water dripping from Will's lips to his chin, enjoying the sight before choosing the last possible second to reach out and sensuously wipe it off, as if he wasn't the kind of snob who usually wouldn't do such a thing without a napkin.

"You need to be properly looked after, darling, it's all just as I expected. I'm not attempting to take advantage of the fact, but I also cannot ignore that you have been neglected to the point of fading health and even more troubling melancholy."

This was another of those Hannibal speeches that sounded like it should be carved in pure gold on a porcelain plate and kept on a mantel in someone's castle, high up in the clouds. He was about as perfect as Will could imagine a potential lover being, at least if you happened to be an excessively tired young man with a yawning abyss where "ever having been loved" should have taken up room in his memory. Or, honestly, Hannibal would probably still be perfect even if the object of his pursuit was more secure, emotionally-slash-mentally stable, and less quickly rendered infatuation-drunk by attention, sweet words and gentle touches that seemed to suggest that things could get rougher whenever Will wanted them to.

Nervously, slowly, Will turned Hannibal's hand over and slid his own right over it until they were aligned. Hannibal was bigger, a little tanner, and there were light calluses on his hands (from which of his hobbies? Maybe drawing and cooking?). Will had noticed their presence before, but now he felt them more directly, how they were a bit rougher and landed in different places than his own typical "no center of gravity" bruises, scratches he'd left during recent nightmares, hobby work, and FBI work callouses which were from practicing his shooting for the most part.

Hannibal let his hand rest where it was while Will explored, with the younger man finally resolving that he was too fascinated and needed to break the trance before he fell into it entirely. He smiled up at his – whatever and whoever Hannibal was to him – and said less nervously, "thanks for ordering. It all sounds incredible."

With a small shiver that looked like unadulterated pleasure at Will's attention, sweetly bashful gratitude, and touch, Hannibal shot him a quick, greedy smile. Will thought he saw the jagged edges from a rougher kind of touch, a wish to bestow it that had always seemed to be lingering in the older man's eyes when they darkened like that. And he thought he was almost ready to slice himself open on those edges, see what he was made of on the inside after all, if "Will Graham" was human in there despite not fitting into the species in many other ways. Could he fall in love? Be in a relationship? He'd have to at least attempt intimacy to know for sure, and this was the first time he'd had both the opportunity and the desire.

Could it hurt to try? *Oh, yes.* And it would scar no matter how this all ended. But he knew the pain might be worth it for the sake of however long he could remain in Hannibal's grasp, warm, safe, alive, grateful.

There were…*things* Will could do to show that gratitude, acts which no longer seemed quite as intimidating as they had before. Although he had a lot to learn, there could be no more dedicated teacher, and how else was Will ever going to – finally – understand what exactly one did in the bedroom with a lover? Like when to move, and when it was alright to moan or sigh, to beg and clutch. To ask for and receive discipline when his wild inner forests, overrun with razor wire vines, made him too prone to rebel, to hurt himself just for the reminder he wasn't dead yet, or to buck the reins of Hannibal's authority, make sure they were still there. If there was anything that could drive Hannibal to give him a good spanking, Will thought that would be it.

Hannibal couldn't have any idea how inexperienced Will was…almost completely, in fact. It wasn't a conversation Will looked forward to having, but it was sure to come up sooner than later, given their present trajectory. Flirtation seemed to be wrapped around the two of them with thick red ribbons that held them close, wouldn't stop crushing them together until they gave into temptation. He found that he didn't mind the squeeze so much as he would have thought, that not all pressure was bad. Hannibal's hold was the kind of pressure Will had never dreamed of, and he knew that now, when he laid his head down and drifted under the skin of earthly consciousness, down in the subterranean Other-place where the worst part of him came out to play…he was sure to see Hannibal there as well.

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Dinner was as superb as Will had expected and then some, with the extravagantly rich, soothing and flavorful cuisine complemented by champagne so delicious that he shuddered to imagine its price point. One of his pleasurable shudders, that is.

After ordering two desserts so that they could share both – pumpkin cheesecake with brown-butter pears and chocolate lava cake with tart berries and a delectably melting scoop of french vanilla ice cream – and finishing the dreamy champagne, though Hannibal was clearly still sober, Will stared at the numbers on the check from upside-down as the doctor placed his black credit card on it casually.

He wasn't light-headed from the champagne either, not after such a full and satisfying meal, but Will's world swayed at the sheer number of zeroes on the slip of paper.

"You like it." Hannibal gave him the look again, the famished gaze with lowered lashes, enlarged pupils and quiet darkness. This hunger bore not only the suggestion that only Will could fulfill it, but also words like "insatiable," or even someday "voracious."

Will's face predictably got hotter than the center of the lava cake, the sweetness of decadent chocolate still on his tongue, the deeper envelopment of Hannibal's desires making every inch of his skin feel too sensitive and needy.

"Yes, I do. I'm surprised, I…wouldn't have ever thought…"

"You didn't expect to enjoy being spoiled and even finding pleasure in the blatant details of my expenditures." Hannibal shrugged with a sexily smug expression that only made Will feel hotter. "That's only natural, darling. After all, you've never been treated as you deserve before. How could you know if you would like it or not, without being in the middle of it? I'm euphoric to be the one who gets to take you there for the first time."

Will bit back the urge to confess, "there's something else you can also do to me for the first time in my life" but held back again, his almost-virginity still embarrassing enough that the words wouldn't form. Instead, he noted softly, "You thought I would like it. It's part of why you approached me with the sugar relationship proposal. I wonder what else you think I'll like and find pleasure in."

"Leave everything to me. My sweet boy, just as soon as we get you rested and healthy, I'll show you everything I have in mind. We can go at a pace that's comfortable for you and at no rush. I have so *many* ideas about what you'll like, Will."

An even dizzier Will could tell that for one thing, Hannibal had discovered his previously unknown love of being praised by someone he liked and admired; someone he looked up to and wanted. Someone he could need, if he let himself. The compliments and promises were perfectly fitted to their mutual needs: Will craved and thrived on the affectionate, worshipful words, while Hannibal loved to speak them, loved to watch Will's shyly sincere blossoming.

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They sat in the car as it finished warming up, with Hannibal's arm wrapped around Will's shoulders. It was a gesture intended to help Will keep warm in the ever-cooler weather that still permeated their skin, and once again Will got it without asking. Pleasure from every aspect of this moment and the night which had preceded it sank into Will's pores, flooding him with bliss and an automatic fear of losing it, losing Hannibal. It was already much too late to save himself as far as that went. The loss would be…he was afraid it would be like an annihilation.

It felt like he hadn't existed in any real way until knowing this man, and Will wanted to roll his eyes at his own melodramatic inner monologue. He had made his share of increasingly fond jokes about Hannibal's penchant for drama, but it was starting to sound like the pot calling the kettle black.

Instead of accusing himself or Hannibal of anything or letting negative thoughts eat away at the delightful interlude, Will almost relaxed. He couldn't do it entirely yet, but he was further into it than he had thought he could go.

"That's a good boy, letting Daddy take care of you," Hannibal murmured experimentally. He let a few quick breaths come and go in the warming space between them and then added, "How was that?"

"It sounded completely natural," Will marveled, but he did have to hide his face in Hannibal's shoulder in order to admit this.

"For me, no words could be more so, or at least, none that I feel I should speak at present. This is a marvelous beginning, beautiful boy. You've given me so much more than I dreamed of during the dull hours and days since we last met."

Will hadn't given him anything but his messily emotional, neurotically confused and now also horny company. So this comment did nothing to coax him into showing his face again. The bliss melted away his habitual sadness as he nuzzled a little more, right where he was, breathing in Hannibal's cologne, mesmerized by how everything about this man was… erotic.

Inside the Bentley in the restaurant parking lot didn't feel like a hideaway anymore, but more as if they were no longer in the same dimension with "real life" and its countless heavy tediums.

Almost at the same time, cued by some invisible choreography beyond words, Will lifted his face desirously and Hannibal leaned in to meet that desire. Tenderly, with such unspeakable tenderness that it killed Will, Hannibal brushed their lips together. After a few moments of gentle warmth, Hannibal drew back and played with Will's curls.

As Will looked up at him, fingers still gripping the older man's coat for dear life, he saw Hannibal's regal features half-draped in shadow. A tragedy to conceal any part of such handsomeness, yet it suited his sleek beauty. Will watched in a state of rapture as the dark outlines of tree branches swaying in the wind moved across chiseled cheekbones and plush lips.

He suddenly thought the shadows would feel like velvet, and reached up, slowly tracing them with his curious fingers.

"Will, I had such a wonderful time."

Will nodded, entranced. "It was…something else." He smiled.

"What do you dream of?" Hannibal asked, and by now, Will decided he deserved to know.

To know what he was getting into.

He wasn't that worried about his strangeness driving Hannibal away, not when they were like this, so it felt okay to talk about it, or as okay as it could.

“I often see a big, powerful-looking but elegant and graceful stag. He stalks me everywhere I go in my dreams, usually the woods around my house. The dreams start out normal; I’ll be walking with my dogs or going fishing. Then, suddenly I’m alone except for him. He can change into a monster-version of a man, this kind of…stag-man. I think he does it to impress me.” He kept methodically tracing the shadows on Hannibal’s face, taking comfort in the act as Hannibal listened intently.

“He does so many depraved things,” Will continued. “Bloody, gruesome things. And all I can usually do is watch. I can’t tell if it’s terror paralyzing me, or morbid fascination. He does everything with undeniable beauty.”

If Hannibal wondered what occurred in the dreams when Will was not frozen, and whether Will partook in the gruesome acts of the stag-man, he must have decided against asking right now. He asked something else instead.

“How often do you dream of this stag, or stag-man?”

“All the time, even when I drift off during the day. Lately, I see him when I’m awake. Just now and then, but it’s obviously…disturbing. Feels like he’s always there, but I only see him sometimes.”

“Hallucination” was another word Hannibal gave no voice to at present.

“You must despise this creature for tormenting you so.” He stroked Will’s back, still hanging on the younger man’s every word.

“See, that’s the thing. It’s not that easy. Nothing ever is. I don’t even resent him…he’s only following his nature and the urges it inspires. To him, these inspirations are divine. He follows and is his own religion. He does whatever he wants, including with me, to me. He’s not bound by any law of the mortal realm. And…he *likes* me. I’m his favorite. My fear never makes him give up and go away. I know how crazy it sounds, believe me, but I guess with the work I do, these kinds of recurring stress dreams come with the territory. They often contain traces of the crimes I’m trying to solve at the time.”

“And the dreams have intensified as this fever has been rising.” Hannibal rested his hand on Will’s forehead. “You’re not burning up, but your temperature is certainly elevated.”

Will nodded. “I’m so tired of being afraid. That might be the source of all my exhaustion.”

“You fight battles no one else can see as they burden you with yet more foes to either vanquish or embrace. I can hardly imagine when you have time to breathe.”

“I can breathe right now, here with you.”

“Many things aren’t easy, too many parts of your life are gratingly difficult…”

“But this feels easy, Hannibal. It takes the weight off my heart, but I don’t want to put it on you.”

“You let me worry about that. I’ll take on every iota of stress if it clears your mind and lets you breathe, lets you smile that beautiful smile.”

Will moved for another kiss clumsily, but he had to do it before his nerve ran out. The feeling when their lips met again was electric; the kiss became deeper and wetter than before. He tasted Hannibal’s surprise and pleasure and moaned without wondering if it was alright to.

Hannibal kissed him slowly, thoroughly, as if savoring every minute sensation. At first Will assumed it was the kiss making him feel increasingly faint, that he really was too tired and needed to stop, needed rest. But he *couldn’t* stop, couldn’t get enough.

Between kisses, he gasped as their foreheads pressed together. He’d forgotten what lonely felt like for a few precious seconds there. Maybe he’d never not been alone until now.

In so many ways it was too much, provocative and prophetic; if the first few kisses were this good and it was only going to get better…*oh, God.*

Hannibal kissed his softly frantic moans away and that was when it happened: Will fell deeper into the kiss, his last thought before fainting that he couldn’t ever leave this kiss again. He *mustn’t.*

The dizziness enfolded him in Hannibal’s arms, making it easy to surrender to the sweltering blackness infringing on his perceptions. He opened his eyes and saw Hannibal, in something like a lightning flash, change from himself to the stag-man and back again. The illusion was so convincing that he wanted to scream without being sure if the sound would be horrified or euphoric. But he couldn’t speak a word, much less cry out.

Then Will dropped away and was simply gone, unconscious, still caught up in Hannibal’s arms with the feeling that it was finally safe to let go.

Chapter End Notes

Next time: Hannibal takes Will to the hospital, where his encephalitis is treated. Other People begin to irritate Hannibal by attempting to get between him and his boy, but nothing can keep him away. Come hell or highwater, he will be there waiting faithfully when Will wakes up, holding his hand.

End Notes

**Next time:** Curiosity compels Will irresistibly to see Hannibal again.

**Story playlist:** https://open.spotify.com/playlist/67hzrwjzlPB03aDj7dKXXf?si=61467ce2aed44662
(More songs will be added for the later chapters of the fic)

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